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INSIDE



Joeten is 55

Fifty-five years ago, the late Jose Tenorio and his wife Soledad put up a small mom-and-pop store in Chalan Kanoa, a venture that would eventually catapult itself to one of the biggest locally owned conglomerate in the Northern Marianas.

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Revolt?

The party of opposition presidential hopeful Fernando Poe Jr. warned Wednesday of another "people power" revolt if he's cheated of the presidency—fighting words in a nation where popular protests have knocked two leaders out of office.

Page 31



Intense Fighting

U.S. tanks, helicopters and jets attacked fighters loyal to a radical Shiite cleric in this holy city Wednesday, partially destroying a mosque used by insurgents and setting seven hotels ablaze. Twenty-two militants were killed.

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7-month revenue only at \$107M

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

The CNMI government collected only \$107.3 million in the first seven months of fiscal year 2004, making it impossible for the Babauta administration to justify its proposed \$226 million budget for fiscal year 2005.

In a report submitted by the Department of Finance covering the period from October 2003 to April 30, 2004, the total collection of the government amounted to only \$107.32 million, which is way below the \$213 million projected by the department for the entire fiscal year.

According to House Speaker Benigno R. Fitial, the House leadership is currently holding a series of meetings with Finance Secretary Fermin Atalig and other officials to look into the revenue

resources of the government as part of the ongoing discussion on the proposed 2005 budget proposal.

"The administration should take notice that we don't have \$200 million right now. We [need] to sit down with the administration so that we could agree on reasonable resources," said the speaker.

He stressed that the House continues to look for reasonable additional resources that the government can tap into to enhance its revenue collection.

Fitial said he wants the department to continue providing the House leadership with data on the government's revenue resources and the cost of debt service.

The situation prompted the House to adopt House Concurrent Resolution 14-1, which sets the total anticipated resources for fiscal year 2005 at only \$190 million, with the requirement that expenditures for FY 2005 should not

See 7-MONTH on Page 8

Taxi operations to stop by Sept. 2003 unless...

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

By September 2004, all 193 taxicabs operating at the Duty Free Shoppers and around the island would stop operation when the insurance policy of each motor vehicle expires.

To date, 30 percent of the total number of taxicabs have halted operations. According to taxi operators, the remaining 70 percent would stop taxi business by August 2004 due to the continued refusal by various insurance firms in the CNMI to grant them insurance coverage. By August, all taxicabs would be eliminated from Saipan, they said.

To forestall this grim picture, the group has turned to the Legislature for help in coming up with a measure that would make it mandatory for insurance companies to provide them coverage.

The group hurdled the first step yesterday when the 14th CNMI House of Representatives passed House Bill 14-166 that amends Public Law 11-55 to provide for the inclusion of taxicab operators in the mandatory automobile insurance coverage provided by insurance providers at the coverage rate set under Public Law 9-29.

The Committee on Commerce and Tourism noted that the Department of

See TAXI on Page 8



SHAN SEMAN

TOP THIS

A Seisa Gakuen High School student shows off his dance moves during a cultural exchange activity at the World Resort Hotel. Marianas High School played host to over 100 guests from the Japanese school, who arrived on Saipan Wednesday and will take part in several events, including this Saturday's Cultural Day at the MHS campus. Their arrival marks the 18th Annual Cultural Exchange Program.

Average junior reads at 3rd-grade level But Hopwood sees 11 percent overall improvement

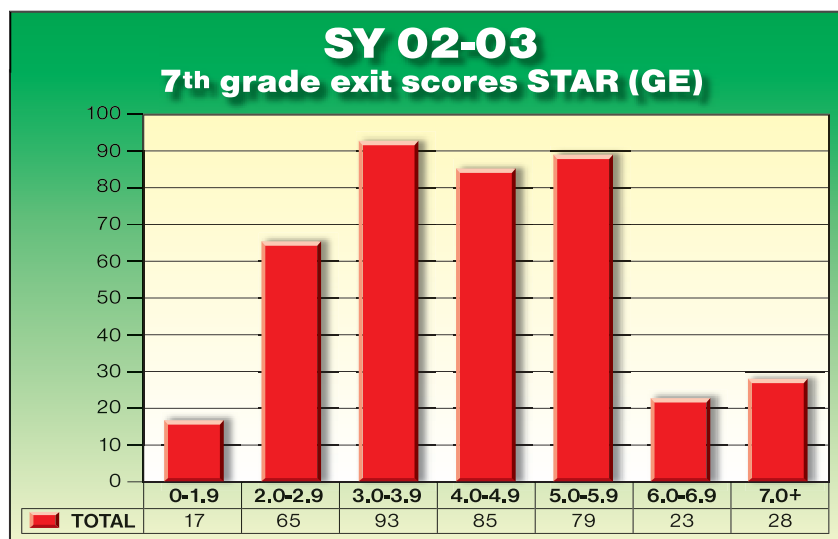
By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Latest reading assessments showed that most of Hopwood Junior High School students have improved significantly within one year but the fact remains that most of them read below their grade level.

Records showed that in school year 2002-2003, 93 percent of 7th grade students read below their grade level, with the average reader at 3rd-grade level and with more at 2nd and 4th level.

The percentage lowered to 82 percent when the same group of students—now in 8th grade—were tested during the current year.

See AVERAGE on Page 8



Man killed in traffic accident

By SHAN SEMAN
REPORTER

An early morning drive along Beach Road Garapan proved fatal for a 20-year-old man after his vehicle veered off the road and crashed yesterday.

The incident marked the fifth traffic fatality in the CNMI this year.

Police reports indicated that the man, Satoshi Banzai, was driving a black 2000 Toyota Tundra pickup with license plate number ABS-880 heading north by the 13th Fishermen monument. The vehicle had reportedly encroached into the southbound lane; at that point, the driver report-

See MAN on Page 8

CARS UNLIMITED

cb cruz

lottery

CENTURY
TRAVEL

COMMUNITY

Briefs

MHS Cultural Day on Saturday

The students, staff and faculty of the Marianas High School (Home of the Dolphins!) is inviting all the parents, guardians and community to join them in their 26th Annual Cultural Day Celebration on Saturday, May 15, from 9am to 2pm. This year's theme, "Life in the Marianas," will showcase cultural dances, booths and entertainment.

For more information, call MHS at 664-3800.

Attention Chuukese citizens

This is to inform all Chuukese citizens and regional leaders that there will be a meeting on Sunday, May 16, at 2:30pm to 6:30pm. the meeting will be at the Carolinian Utt, Garapan.

Red Cross annual membership meeting

The Northern Marianas Islands Chapter of the American Red Cross will hold its annual membership meeting on Thursday, May 27, 2004, at 5:30pm, at the Chapter Office (234-3459) on Airport Road, San Vicente, Saipan. The purpose of the meeting is to hold elections for the voting members of its Board of Directors, review reports, Chapter Directors, and transact other business as it may come before the membership meeting.

LibDay concession forms available

Food concession application forms for the upcoming Liberation Day Festival are now available for pick up at the Arts Council office. For more information, call Angel S. Hocog at 322-9982/3 or George Fitial at 664-2568/9.

SCS yard sale on May 22

The Saipan Community School us having its yearly yard sale on Saturday, May 22, on Beach Road in Susupe from 8am to 12 noon.

DES PTA meeting

Parents and guardians of Dandan Elementary School are being informed that the school will have its last PTA meeting for school year 2003-2004 on Tuesday, May 18, at 6:30pm in the school cafeteria.

EMO warns of bombing runs on FDM

The U.S. military is conducting live fire bombing exercise on the island of Farallon De Mendenilla and the Emergency Management Office is warning people to stay away from the area.

The bombing runs would began on May 10 and will run up to May to 16, from 7am to 11pm.

The general location of this activity will be on the island of Farallon De Mendenilla training area (R7201) from 15,000 feet mean sea level on a 10 nautical mile radius on all quadrants.

Due to the danger posed by this activity, the EMO said the public, especially fishermen, commercial pilots, and tour operators, are advised to stay away from this site during the time and dates indicated.

For more information, call the EMO Operations Section at 322-9529/8001-3, Ext. 23, 24, 31, VHF Marine CHNL 16, Single Side Band Radio on 5.205.0, or visit the website at www.cnmiemo.org.

Pageant postponed

The officers and organizers of the 2004 Queen of the World Gay Pageant sponsored by the Visayas-Mindanao Association (VIS-MINDA), which is scheduled on May 15, at Hotel Nikko Saipan would like to extend their sincerest apologies to the public as the said event is temporarily put on hold until further notice.

For those who have already purchased tickets, please hold on to that and do not worry because it would still be honored later on.

For more information, call Visminda president Nel Atalig 322-0691 or Ted Antiquena at 288-2677.

Public library celebrates Family Literacy Month

In celebration of Family Literacy Month, the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library is informing the public that the Children's Librarian will be having an evening story hour on Thursdays for the month of May. The story hour will be held on May 13 and 20, from 6pm-7pm.

KagES Cultural Day set

The Kagman Elementary School will be holding its 3rd Annual Cultural Day on May 15 from 8am to 3pm.

The annual KagES Cultural Day celebrates the different cultures represented by the school community through song, dance, food and game booths, and various performances. It is hoped that, through this, its students will become socially responsible individuals who respect, and demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures that fosters appreciation, tolerance and understanding of individual differences.

The public is welcome to participate.

Memorial Day meetings set

On May 31, 2004, Memorial Day, the CNMI will be paying tribute to fallen members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The Office of the Military/Veterans Affairs would like to remind all concerned and interested that the Memorial Day Committee meetings will be held at its office on Capital Hill, Building #1364, every Wednesday at 10am. All are welcome.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF APRIL 10, 2004									
DEPARTURES					ARRIVALS				
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
66401	4:00am	4:15am	10-4:00	0	66401	4:00am	4:15am	10-4:00	0
66402	4:15am	4:30am	10-4:15	10-4:15	66402	4:15am	4:30am	10-4:15	0
66403	4:30am	4:45am	10-4:30	0	66403	4:30am	4:45am	10-4:30	0
66404	4:45am	5:00am	10-4:45	0	66404	4:45am	5:00am	10-4:45	0
66405	5:00am	5:15am	10-5:00	0	66405	5:00am	5:15am	10-5:00	0
66406	5:15am	5:30am	10-5:15	0	66406	5:15am	5:30am	10-5:15	0
66407	5:30am	5:45am	10-5:30	10-5:30	66407	5:30am	5:45am	10-5:30	0
66408	5:45am	6:00am	10-5:45	0	66408	5:45am	6:00am	10-5:45	0
66409	6:00am	6:15am	10-6:00	0	66409	6:00am	6:15am	10-6:00	0
66410	6:15am	6:30am	10-6:15	0	66410	6:15am	6:30am	10-6:15	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
66411	6:30am	6:45am	10-6:30	0	66411	6:30am	6:45am	10-6:30	0
66412	6:45am	7:00am	10-6:45	0	66412	6:45am	7:00am	10-6:45	0
66413	7:00am	7:15am	10-7:00	0	66413	7:00am	7:15am	10-7:00	0
66414	7:15am	7:30am	10-7:15	0	66414	7:15am	7:30am	10-7:15	0
66415	7:30am	7:45am	10-7:30	0	66415	7:30am	7:45am	10-7:30	0
66416	7:45am	8:00am	10-7:45	0	66416	7:45am	8:00am	10-7:45	0
66417	8:00am	8:15am	10-8:00	0	66417	8:00am	8:15am	10-8:00	0
66418	8:15am	8:30am	10-8:15	0	66418	8:15am	8:30am	10-8:15	0
66419	8:30am	8:45am	10-8:30	0	66419	8:30am	8:45am	10-8:30	0
66420	8:45am	9:00am	10-8:45	0	66420	8:45am	9:00am	10-8:45	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
66421	9:00am	9:15am	10-9:00	0	66421	9:00am	9:15am	10-9:00	0
66422	9:15am	9:30am	10-9:15	0	66422	9:15am	9:30am	10-9:15	0
66423	9:30am	9:45am	10-9:30	0	66423	9:30am	9:45am	10-9:30	0
66424	9:45am	10:00am	10-9:45	0	66424	9:45am	10:00am	10-9:45	0
66425	10:00am	10:15am	10-10:00	0	66425	10:00am	10:15am	10-10:00	0
66426	10:15am	10:30am	10-10:15	0	66426	10:15am	10:30am	10-10:15	0
66427	10:30am	10:45am	10-10:30	0	66427	10:30am	10:45am	10-10:30	0
66428	10:45am	11:00am	10-10:45	0	66428	10:45am	11:00am	10-10:45	0
66429	11:00am	11:15am	10-11:00	0	66429	11:00am	11:15am	10-11:00	0
66430	11:15am	11:30am	10-11:15	0	66430	11:15am	11:30am	10-11:15	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
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66432	11:45am	12:00pm	10-11:45	0	66432	11:45am	12:00pm	10-11:45	0
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66440	1:45pm	2:00pm	10-1:45	0	66440	1:45pm	2:00pm	10-1:45	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
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66442	2:15pm	2:30pm	10-2:15	0	66442	2:15pm	2:30pm	10-2:15	0
66443	2:30pm	2:45pm	10-2:30	0	66443	2:30pm	2:45pm	10-2:30	0
66444	2:45pm	3:00pm	10-2:45	0	66444	2:45pm	3:00pm	10-2:45	0
66445	3:00pm	3:15pm	10-3:00	0	66445	3:00pm	3:15pm	10-3:00	0
66446	3:15pm	3:30pm	10-3:15	0	66446	3:15pm	3:30pm	10-3:15	0
66447	3:30pm	3:45pm	10-3:30	0	66447	3:30pm	3:45pm	10-3:30	0
66448	3:45pm	4:00pm	10-3:45	0	66448	3:45pm	4:00pm	10-3:45	0
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66450	4:15pm	4:30pm	10-4:15	0	66450	4:15pm	4:30pm	10-4:15	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
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Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
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66490	2:15am	2:30am	10-2:15	0	66490	2:15am	2:30am	10-2:15	0
Saipan-Magadan					Saipan-Magadan				
66491	2:30am	2:45am	10-2:30	0	66491	2:30am	2:45am	10-2:30	0

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RP poll results in NMI up
for national tabulation

House, Diego to meet on MRC issue

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

The Philippine Consulate General on Saipan disclosed yesterday that election results in the Asian country’s absentee voting in the CNMI have been transmitted to the Philippine election commission.

Consul General Wilfredo Maximo said the poll results were transmitted through the Philippines’ Department of Foreign Affairs so that they could be tabulated along with election results from other absentee voting centers and from across the country.

He described the absentee voting process—the first time that the system was implemented by the Philippine government to allow its citizens abroad to exercise their right to vote—as a success in the CNMI.

“[Voter turnout] was fairly consistent with the overall figure for overseas absentee voting conducted elsewhere,” Maximo said. “We would have liked it very much if we [were] able to attract a greater number of voters on the last voting day.”

A total of 4,740 out of 7,003 registered Filipino voters cast their ballots at the polling place on Saipan, which translates to a voter turnout percentage of 67.68.

Maximo also brushed aside complaints reported on national television in the Philippines, which assailed the absence of a polling center on Rota.

He said the number of registered voters on Rota only totaled over 350, less than the 500 total that would have necessitated the establishment of a polling center. The consulate put up the lone polling center for Filipino voters in the entire Commonwealth at the Nauru Building in Susupe, Saipan.

Maximo also said the official

results of the absentee voting polls on Saipan coincide with the unofficial results released Wednesday by the National Movement for Free Elections, a Philippine election watchdog. Maximo and Philippine consul Wenceslao Gayola supervised the electoral process as special board of election inspectors.

NAMFREL had reported that incumbent Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo won the presidential race in the Saipan polls by getting 2,047 votes. The candidates trailing behind Arroyo according to their ranking, were movie actor Fernando Poe Jr., who had 1,096 votes; former police chief and senator Panfilo Lacson, 645 votes; former senator and resigned Education Secretary Raul Roco, 461 votes; and religious leader Eddie Villanueva, 435 votes.

In the vice presidential race, Noli de Castro pulled away with a big margin over his rivals, defeating fellow newsman and senator Loren Legarda. De Castro got 3,183 votes, while Legarda only had 1,383. Far behind them were Herminio S. Aquino, who had 83 votes, and Rodolfo T. Pajo, who only got 3 votes.

In the senatorial race, former Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim topped the Saipan polls with 3,196 votes. Trade Secretary Mar Roxas, grandson of a former Philippine president, ranked second with 2,925 votes, while Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon followed next with 2,742 votes.

The other candidates who made it to the top 12 and their respective votes were: Bong Revilla, 2,655; Orlando Mercado, 2,435; Lito Lapid, 2,336; Robert Barbers, 2,330; Rodolfo Biazon, 2,321; Aquilino Pimentel Jr., 2,298; Miriam Defensor-Santiago, 2,229; Pilar Juliana Cayetano, 1,838; and Boots Anson-Roa, 1,764.

The House leadership would be meeting today with Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente to iron out issues surrounding the Marine Revitalization Corp. measure.

House Speaker Benigno R. Fitial notified members of the House of Representatives yesterday about the meeting, which will take place at 2pm today.

Among others, the meeting would look into how the needed funding allocation of \$800,000 could be sourced, the speaker said.

During a session yesterday, Rep. David Apatang clarified that his proposed measure

would not dip into the MRC bailout measure that was introduced in 2002; instead, the money would be coming from the Commonwealth Development Authority’s bond interest.

“I want clarification. I am not taking the money away from that bill. It is a different measure and different source of fund,” said Apatang.

Apatang’s measure hopes to appropriate \$800,000 from bond interests proceeds to fund the power upgrade in Obyan, Navy Hill, Capitol Hill, and various road-paving



Fitial



Benavente

The total settlement amount is over \$2 million.

Benavente is one of the proponents of the settlement agreement that was proposed under House Bill 13-267 during the 12th House of Representatives.

In April 1999, MRC, which is owned by Anthony Pellegrino, sued the CNMI government for various breaches involving the company’s operation at the Outer Cove Marina. The suit was later dismissed and in 2002, the CNMI government entered into a settlement agreement with MRC. *(Edith G. Alejandro)*

projects in Precinct 1.

The House leadership is now trying to find money for the MRC measure. A separate bill was also introduced in the 12th and 13th CNMI Legislature, which proposed to give the MRC an initial payment of \$800,000.

pic

lottery

sam

Letters to the Editor

Saipan Tribune welcomes contributions. All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name, address and, if possible, fax or telephone number. Letters are edited for space, clarity and fairness.

\$2M for MRC isn't a bailout

Since the beginning of the MRC controversy, we've seen the use of confusing terms by the media and politicians such as "bailout" with reference to the \$2 million appropriation bill.

Intentional or otherwise, they only add political spin to an already confused issue as to blind the multitude why the proposed \$2 million appropriation.

At Issue: The public land upon which MRC's facilities were built is NMI public land that belongs to the indigenous people. The \$2 million will pay the owners for their expenses incurred while the NMI retrieves, via the first rights of refusal, the land in question.

Otherwise, the NMI loses such rights granting the bank the right to sell it—public land and facilities—in order to recoup money borrowed from it by MRC's owners. It's the protection of Marianas public land.

Taking the property back gives the NMI the opportunity to lease it once again so it becomes a revenue-generating venture. Now we ask: Which is which?

John S. DelRosario, Jr.
Koblerville

Kudos for success of All Schools Track and Field Championships

There were so many people who put in a lot of time and effort into making the All Schools Track and Field Championships a resounding success. The Department of Community and Cultural Affairs and the Northern Mariana Islands Track and Field Federation did a great job. We appreciate your efforts and we thank you for accommodating our athletes.

Rep. Ray Tebuteb was there since the very beginning, and as usual, you were there again. You have always been a booster for the sport of Track and many other sports for the youth. Heinz Hofschneider was instrumental in getting the CNMI this state of the art facility that is the best in the Pacific. The Track is something that the people of the CNMI can be truly proud of.

Edwin P Aldan, Jude Hofschneider, and Patrick Manglona of the 10th Tinian Municipal Council have made a commitment to our Tinian young people. With your continued support, we will develop Tinian Athletes who will represent the CNMI. All politicians gave lip service to youth but you guys put your money where your mouth is.

Tinian Mayor Francisco Borja should be known as the sports mayor. Once again we could not have done anything without your support. Thank you for coming through again.

The Northern Marianas Track and Field Federation showed during the track meet what teamwork is all about. No one was bigger than the sport. Everyone pulled together to accomplish a goal. You guys are one of the few Saipan based organizations who take the time to come over to Tinian to assist us in our events.

We thank the many other people we failed to mention. We would like to thank our competitors most of all. There were many impressive performances and we congratulate all the winners.

Ed Temengil

Tinian High School Team coordinator

Shake Shake Shake

Well, I'm pretty danged good, if I do say so myself, and in February of last year, yes, 15 months ago, I predicted in this very column that an oil price shock was on the way. And it's here. Hooray, let me shake my booty in the end-zone and do the Economic Victory Dance. Then I'll sell a pint of blood for some money so I can afford some gas for my Ford.

Said I, in the February 14, 2003 issue of the Saipan Tribune: "The supply side of the oil market...is looking mighty tight." Bingo! Score one for Ed on the supply side.

Said I, also: "Remember China?...Their industrial muscle is now reaching legendary proportions, and industry is always thirsty for fuel." Hey, this is what the world's Johnny-come-lately's are saying right now, but I said it long, long ago. Indeed, a demand side victory. Score two for Ed. Shake that booty.

And, concluded I, back then: "All things considered, then, I don't think \$2.059 a gallon (for gasoline) is such a bad deal now." Wowzer—a market victory, where supply meets demand. Score three for Ed. High fives, baby.

Indeed, gas has gone up, hasn't it? The Saipan score for go-juice is about \$2.329 now. Hey, it's about \$2.20 to \$2.25 in the nation's largest gas market, California, and they have refineries and oil fields there. So I'd say that Saipan is getting a comparatively sweet deal when you consider the fact it's (a) remote, (b) doesn't have oil fields, (c) doesn't have refineries, and (d) Saipan's suppliers, like all businesses, have to face the risks of doing business in the Commonwealth, which has grown hostile to anything that isn't a government check.

Brace yourself for our usual clown-show of self-aggrandizing bureaucrats who will explain their conspiratorial reasons behind the higher costs of gas. Hey, I've got a reason for you: Higher oil prices are causing higher gas prices. Is that hard to understand? No? Ok, so, please, go ahead and "solve" high oil prices. Mail me a postcard from Riyadh, and send some kisses from Caracas. Lecture us on commodity markets, oligopoly

An ideal labor policy

Q. What in your view may be an ideal labor policy for the CNMI?

A. A lot of juggling action has been around designing and implementing the local labor policy both due to external and internal pressures. Lately there is a renewed attempt to revise this policy by legislative action. A lot of supporting and opposing arguments are being aired on the proposed amendments but very few from the small workforce employers who stand middle of nowhere. Whether an ideal labor will be formulated as a result of this renewed attempt remains to be seen.

An ideal labor policy in my view is one that guarantees 100 percent employment of residents should they chose to be part of the workforce. Though this goal has been desired and safeguards are incorporated in the policy, the end result has been less than satisfactory. A requirement of hiring 20 percent locals which was lowered to 10 percent and now in the current bill starting from 10 percent and eventually going up to 20 percent is one example of juggling action on this issue. How naïve an action of mandating resident employment level that is not possible for the private sector to fulfill, given the available resident workforce over and above the needs of public sector. Raising minimum wages to around five dollars is also

Prison abuse victim to get Oprah moment

By JAMES P. PINKERTON
SPECIAL TO NEWSDAY

CHICAGO, IN THE NOT-SO-DISTANT-FUTURE—"Our next guest, here on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show,' is Ali ibn Ali, also known as 'The Notorious A.L.I.' Let's give him a big welcome!"

An Iraqi man, in his late 20s and walking with a slight limp, kisses Oprah on both cheeks.

"Americans first laid eyes on Ali in May 2004. He was one of the prisoners at Abu Ghraib near Baghdad. Accused of plotting to kill American GIs, he had been abused and mistreated. But then, after a spectacular trial in which his lead attorney, Johnnie Cochran, delivered a stirring summation, broadcast worldwide, Ali was released.

"Since then, of course, his life has changed. There was the lawsuit of Ali v. Rumsfeld, CACI, Halliburton, et al. It was the first billion-dollar personal tort judgment in history. Johnnie was great in that case, too. Who can forget his famous line, 'If Ali took a whack, Uncle Sam must pay back!' And then, of course, he went on to a worldwide media tour, co-sponsored by Al-Jazeera TV and the government of France. And now he's here with us, in the Windy City."

Oprah flashes him her trademark smile.

"Ali, you've been through so much: the abuse, the rabies treatment, and now, you are a worldwide celebrity-victim. How does all that make you feel, Notorious Ali?"

The man cracks a porcelain-capped smile.

"Just call me 'Ali.' I never liked the nickname MTV gave me after

By ED STEPHENS

Ed Stephens, Jr. is an economist and columnist for the Saipan Tribune. "Ed4Saipan@yahoo.com"



pricing theory, and gas prices, I could use a good laugh.

Oil has hit \$40 a barrel, sirs and madames, and has only avoided higher prices because the U.S. dollar has enjoyed some kind of bizarre dead cat bounce. We may see \$30 a barrel again in the short term (though I doubt it), but never in the long term. By contrast, \$50 is likely. I don't know the timing, since I don't know (a) when the international markets will sober up and dump their dollars, and (b) what weirdness is around the next bend on the global military front. And, how about (c), if that crazy Euro becomes the currency basis for oil, which will be one of those things that makes the history books.

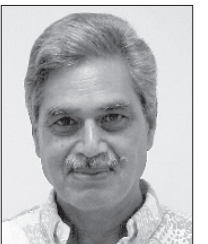
Not that I've ever read a history book, mind you, but I did read "Zippy the Pinhead From Outer Space," which isn't exactly history, but I had read it before, back in college after I broke up with my girlfriend because she gained weight, so I had nothing to do that weekend but eat pizza and read Zippy comics. I don't know if that qualifies as history or not, strictly speaking, but I'm burned out on semantics for the week so you'll have to suffer through it.

And speaking of suffering, gas prices may never, ever, get back to the \$2.059 level of 15 months ago. Hey, I warned you, right? Right.

Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to do another dance of victory in the end-zone, shaking this booty of mine, while adoring fans buy me cold Coronas, and while I spike my IBM Thinkpad into the turf with an air of triumph. Economics is all about prediction, baby. That's all it's good for.

By MOHAMMAD ASHRAF, PH.D.

Ashraf is an International Resource Economist. He is solely responsible for the views expressed in this column and doesn't represent the views of Saipan Tribune. His email address is ashmdr@hotmail.com



being pushed to encourage residents to go into private sector jobs.

Now, you might think that I am juggling the ball on this issue. Not really. I'm trying to broaden the view on this issue. Who can prove that five dollars an hour wage will entice the residents to line up for private sector jobs? Given the cost of living in the CNMI, it may be absurd to think that one can support an independent living on American standards unless one continues to join mom's dining table.

In summary, an effective labor policy calls for fortifying health and safety laws at workplace in line with federal laws and leave wages subject to negotiation between employers and employees. To ensure full employment of locals, reserve certain business activities for the local entrepreneurs.

my appearance on 'TRL.' I feel good, Oprah. I'm spending more time with my family, most of whom are in Detroit now—except, of course, for my cousins who are fighting with the Fedayeen Saddam."

Oprah smiles right back at him.

"You speak such good English, Ali."

"I learned it from the BBC."

Oprah leans in, the light of candles glancing off her moist eyes. She reaches out to touch his hand.

"After all you've been through, so what do you think of the United States now?"

Ali answers.

"At first I was shocked by what I saw here. In Iraq, torture and rape were private matters. Here in America, when I turn on your television, I see that it is a public matter. I see the show 'Oz' on HBO, and I say to myself, 'Wow! I have been there!' And to think, you Americans pay money to see that. And the actors become stars. No wonder the men and women of the 320th Military Police Battalion were so eager to pose for pictures; they wanted to be famous on television, too! But of course, as you say here, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. And so that's why I agreed to co-star in the 'Great Scenes of Sex and Violence' video series, alongside Paris Hilton and Rodney King. I must say, for a country of infidels who are all going to hell, you can have a lot of fun here, especially in Las Vegas."

Oprah beams. "But now, of course, you're off to the White House."

"Yes, I will be going to meet your president, to receive an apology from her in person. Then I will have achieved closure."

Pinkerton is a Newsday columnist.

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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Northern Islands get \$90K fishing grant

By **LIBERTY DONES**
REPORTER

Northern Islands Mayor Valentin I. Taisakan said his office has now received its much-awaited \$90,000 federal grant for the municipality's remote fishing station project.

"We're very happy about this. We're grateful to everybody who helped us get this funding," said Taisakan yesterday.

The mayor said the money will be used to assist residents of Alamagan in setting up a small fishing station to promote subsistence fishing and to jump-start a small commercial operation.

Taisakan said the funding will be used to purchase traditional fishing canoes, small aluminum boats, solar power panels and accessories, chest freezers, sea-water desalination equipment, water tanks, fishing lines and hooks, and other related fishing gear to ensure a safe and viable method of fishing.

The mayor's office originally sought for a \$125,000 grant to cover the construction of two fishing stations in the Northern Islands, including one on Anatahan.

Taisakan's office first submitted the project proposal in June 2002 to the U.S. Department of Commerce National Marine Fisheries Services office in Hawaii and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

In October 2002, the Mayor's Office was asked to submit additional forms to update the application.

In August and September 2003, the project passed a clearinghouse review, leading to the approval of the grant.

But the amount was reduced in view of the recent eruption of Anatahan volcano.

This even as the Northern Islands Mayor's Office is pursuing a development plan for the whole islands, which

requires legislative approval.

It includes the passage of the Northern Islands Transportation and Infrastructure Financing Act, which would allow the government to borrow money to buy a passenger vessel, a cargo vessel and the construction of ramps on Saipan and four Northern Islands targeted for the development of terminal facilities.

The plan also includes setting up of

ports or terminals to allow easy access to the islands of Anatahan, Sarigan, Alamagan, Pagan, Agrigan and Asuncion on a daily basis.

The Mayor's Office is also lobbying for a homesteading program and the passage of an economic development and incentive act, an initiative that would provide incentives or tax credits to Northern Islands developers or investors.



MES LANCHEROS

Saipan Agricultural Fair Association officials pose during a meeting Thursday morning at the newly renovated 4-H Youth Building in Kilili Beach, Susupe. From right, Isidoro Cabrera, Matias Chargualaf, Ben Borja, Diego Camacho, and Polly Omechelang. The group will spearhead a three-day Agri Fair on May 28 to 30.

LIBERTY DONES

7-MONTH

From Page 1

exceed that amount.

The resolution, offered by Committee on Way and Means chair Norman Palacios, provides that subsequent bills making appropriations for FY2005 shall not approve expenditures for the operation of the CNMI government that would exceed the \$190 million limit until such time that additional taxation is approved, additional revenues are received, or the Governor revises his estimates to anticipate financial resources in excess of the estimates.

According to the House leadership, the governor can resubmit his budget plan if he identifies and collects A supplemental budget for the fiscal year; it

said the Saipan Legislative Delegation would also continue to assist the governor in finding ways on how to increase the government's revenue resources.

Still, Fitial said, the Legislature will not support any additional taxes so long as the economy is bad.

In its report, the Finance Department said the available sources of income and revenues for fiscal year 2005 would come from income taxes, excise tax, liquid fuel tax, beverage container tax, garment user fee, hotel occupancy, bar tax, beautification tax, licenses and fees, charges for services, nonresident workers fee fund, deportation fund, local revenue, tobacco control fund, tobacco master settlement fund, and other revenues from penalties, interest income, business privilege fee, lottery

revenue, and net of bond proceeds.

In his budget proposal, Gov. Juan N. Babauta estimates the total revenue and resources for FY 2005 to be \$226.3 million, net of debt services, of which \$212.6 million would be collected from existing sources, including the Nonresident Workers Fee Fund, the Tobacco Control Fund, and the Tobacco Settlement Fund, and approximately \$13.6 million would come from the revenue enhancement and cost-cutting plan outlined in the Integrated Fiscal Plan of the administration.

The projections also showed that from \$30.1 million in FY2004, garment user fees would increase to \$34.44 million in FY2005. The government also listed other sources of revenue that it expects to generate some \$18.86 mil-

lion, an increase of over \$7 million from this year's \$11 million.

The Department of Finance projects General Fund resources for 2005 at \$209.78 million—some \$4.36 million less than the revenue collections in FY 2003.

"The reason for this projected decrease in available resources is the increase in debt service—a \$60 million capital improvement bond—that begins in FY2005. This was previously an interest payment but will now be a payment on both interest and principal," Babauta said.

The governor explained that because of the debt service, there would be a \$1.305-million decrease in the General Fund. The debt service for the land compensation bond would also begin in FY2005.

AVERAGE

From Page 1

This year, the average reader in 8th grade is at 5th-grade level.

Overall, the assessment reflected a significant 11-percent improvement in student grade placement in one year—when the school began to fully implement its STAR assessment and Accelerated Reader program.

A normal improvement goal in one year is 7 percent.

Within two years, school authorities project to raise the improvement rate to an average of 22 percent.

Data released by HJHS yesterday showed that from 17 students last year, there are now only six who read below 2nd-grade level, 34 students read at 2nd-grade level (from 65 last year), 68 read at 3rd-grade level (from 93 last year), 72 read at 4th-grade level (from 85 last year).

The assessment also showed there are more students this year who read at 5th- to 7th-grade reading level.

From 79 students in 5th level, it rose this year to 86; from 23 students in 6th

level, it is now up to 61 students; and from only 28 students reading at 7th-grade level, the figure increased to 70.

"It's amazing. Results show significant growth with only one year of full implementation of the program," said HJHS reading resource teacher Christine Tudela.

School authorities said this all came about when they invested in a computer-based reading assessment program and a corresponding AR program that monitors students' reading performance. The program cost \$25,000.

Part of the AR program is requiring HJHS language arts students to read between 30 to 60 minutes everyday.

They are also given 15 minutes of reading in every class that is not Language Arts.

AR books, according to HJHS alternative education teacher Christine Halloran, have quizzes so when students are done reading, they take a quiz that will show comprehension results.

The available quizzes, she said, are

for AR books for readers with reading levels of 3 and above. She said the school will be ordering more quizzes that will accommodate readers who are below 3 levels. There are about 1,700 quizzes available at the school.

Halloran said the school would need

Marianas, which the school used to buy books and quizzes.

"We encourage everybody and various organizations, to donate and be part of this wonderful program," she said.

HJHS teachers said the program is expensive "but it's very much worth it."

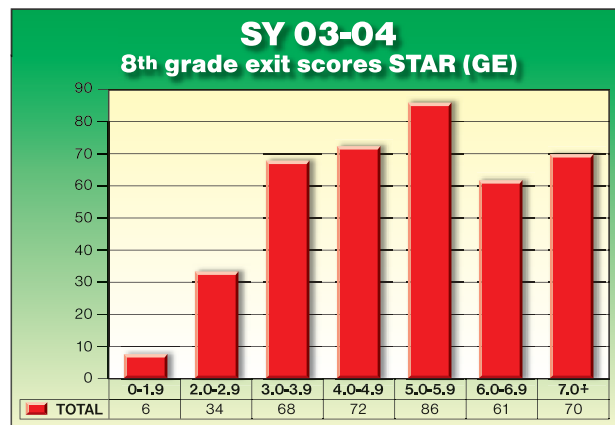
"When you see students reading in every corner, you'd be amazed. They love reading! They are excited about them being able to read several books and knowing their test results immediately. They are self-motivated. There's no 'bribing' at all," Halloran said.

Language arts teacher Rory Starkey said the program has turned HJHS students into avid readers, citing that 100 percent of

the students have checked out books from the school library.

He said some students are able to read 150 books a year.

Under the program, he said students get to choose their favorite books within their level.



at least \$900 at present to purchase needed quizzes for its students.

She said this is one area where the community can help promote reading among students.

She noted that HJHS actually received a total of \$4,000 from Mobil

TAXI

From Page 1

Commerce had informed it that insurance providers in the CNMI are no longer writing new coverage for taxicab vehicle policies or renewing expiring policies for taxi vehicles since January 2004.

Taxi operators are now preparing for the next step to ensure the swift passage of the measure. The group will lobby for the passage of the bill at the Senate.

Saipan City Taxi Association president Rabby Syed said the economics of the problem does not stop at the insurance policy issue of each taxi drivers but extends to their families as taxicab operators stop earning money due to their inability to insure their vehicle.

"We all need to go back to work and earn for our families. This is not only a business concern, this is about our families," said Syed in an interview after the session held yesterday at the lower house.

He said taxi operators would now begin soliciting the support of all senators in preparation for the session slated Wednesday next week. "We are starting today up to the session next week. We would talk to them and get their support to make this happen. We need their help," Syed stressed.

The bill got the nod of all representatives despite apprehensions of the Northern Marianas Insurance Association. But House Rep. Heinz Hofschneider insists that insurance coverage should be provided now to the taxi operators rather than wait for a multi-million litigation that may arise from an incident involving public transportation.

The passage of the measure would also empower the Insurance Commissioner to promulgate rules and regulations regarding assigned risk plan for motor vehicle liability insurance. Also, the lower house stressed the need to address other issues, including drug testing, uniformity of attire, among others.

MAN

From Page 1

edly lost control of the vehicle. The car swerved back to the northbound lane and onto the shoulder of the road.

Banzai's vehicle then rammed into some sign posts, a fire hydrant, and a utility pole before coming to a rest.

The Department of Public Safety received a call reporting the incident at 5:41am.

The driver was immediately brought to the Commonwealth Health Center where he was pronounced dead by a Dr. Coad at 5:54am.

The report showed that Banzai sustained serious chest and internal injuries. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

DPS public information officer Thomas A. Blas Jr. said speed and alcohol were factors in the crash. He said Banzai had a blood alcohol content reading of 0.19, more than twice the legal amount, which is 0.08.

Also, Blas said the victim was not using his seatbelt.

The vehicle had extensive damage to the left side and was impounded at the DPS.

Last month, a man died after being hit by a vehicle being driven by a driver who was under the influence of alcohol.

microl spin
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Mificpa acquires updated US CPA reviewer

U.S. CPA examinees can now have a glimpse of the new U.S. CPA computerized examination. Eager to provide a rigorous and effective preparation for CPA examinees, especially with the computerized nature of the new CPA examination, the Marianas Institute of Filipino CPA and Accountants bought a new set of updated and comprehensive U.S. CPA review material.

It was produced by no other than the Bisk Education, known as America’s Best CPA reviewer since 1971.

The set includes a complete multimedia software, hot-spots video and textbooks. It provides all the learning features of an on-line reviewer plus sample questions taken from the new computerized CPA exam—all captured in a convenient CD-ROM.

“One can strategically focus and strengthen on his weak areas through the unlimited practice exams, complete with answer keys. It is thrilling and affirming to experience the interactive nature of the new CPA review program as provided by the study performance tracking, automatic grading, statistical analysis of one’s performance, and much more,” a Mificpa statement said.

The program also includes some exam tips, techniques and strategies in answering the questions.

“So brace yourself to face the new computerized CPA exam. Do not miss this high-powered learning opportunity! Come and enlist in the MIFICPA sponsored CPA review classes. Do not waste thousands of dollars by plunging into a CPA exam without adequate review and preparations. An excellent world-class review program awaits you every Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 6pm-9pm,” the statement said.

For interested parties, contact Malou at 234-9696.

“Enlist now and be ready to be the next U.S. CPA passer.”



WSR to hold book fair today

The William S. Reyes Elementary School will hold its annual Young Authors Book Fair today, May 14, 2004, from 8am to 2pm at the school cafeteria.

The theme for this year’s event is “Reading is like a Rainbow, a never ending journey.”

“[WSR] proudly presents the annual Young Authors Book Fair where students will take you along in their journey of reading,” according to a statement received yesterday.

“Through their creative writing, the Kingfisher students will take you for a ride to their favorite place, their favorite food, and any place you want to be.”

For more information, contact the school at 664-3971/72 or fax concerns to 664-3973.

(Shan Seman)

OES Cultural Day on May 15

The Oleai Elementary School Cultural Day will be held this Saturday, May 15, at the OES campus from 9am to 2pm. Tickets sold for April 24 will still be honored.

Oleai Elementary School staff, faculty and PTSA Officers would like to thank the following donors for their generosity: Pioneer, Lucky R Restaurant, Saipan Shipping Co., Saipan Stevedore Co., Duty Free, Tom’s Water, John Ichihara, Roselle Ichihara, Microl Corp., Tina Tenorio, Tracy Del Rosario, Chino’s Sterling Corp., Yodan Ent., McDonald’s, Arnold Seman, Jesus Wabol, Marian Tudela, Megabyte, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Ming Ming Store, Cosmos Distributors, Frankie’s Auto Shop, American Pacific Insurance Agency, and Mr. and Mrs. Rick Cabrera.

shell

Agriculture research grants available

Farmer and rancher grant levels increased

More than \$2.5 million in grant dollars targeting research into sustainable agriculture will be disbursed in the latest round of funding from the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, or Western SARE.

In addition, the size of grants available directly to farmers and ranchers has been increased to \$10,000 from \$7,500 for individual producers and to \$20,000 from \$15,000 for groups of three or more producers.

The \$2.5 million is nearly four times the \$700,000 in annual grants made when Utah State University began hosting the Western SARE program 10 years ago.

“This continual funding increase reflects the acceptance and growth of the concepts of sustainable agriculture in government and among agricultural researchers and procedures,” said Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE coordinator and a USU soil scientist. “The fruits of sustainable research can be found on farms and ranches across the West.”

Western SARE, one of four SARE regions, encompasses 13 Western states and four U.S. territories in the Pacific, including the CNMI.

Its goals are to support research that helps agriculture be more profitable and environmentally responsible and that sustains the quality of life for producers and their communities.

Since the program began in 1988, Western SARE has fund more than 700 projects worth \$30.5 million.

Western SARE Farmer-Rancher grant proposals are due Oct. 1, Research and Education pre-proposals are due June 7 and Professional Development Program proposals are due Oct. 15.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the call for proposals in each grant category, visit the Western SARE Web site at <http://wsare.usu.edu> or call (435) 797-2257.

CUC mulls options on water lab operations

By **LIBERTY DONES**
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. is evaluating whether to take over the operations of its water laboratory or to continue to contract it out to a private company.

This came even as the Division of Environmental Quality recently said that it would re-certify CUC’s water laboratory.

“We are trying to see whether to contract it or operate it ourselves. I believe that re-certification is not an issue now,” CUC board chairman Herman P. Sablan said yesterday.

He said CUC deputy executive director Bernard Villagomez is working with DEQ on the matter.

The DEQ revoked CUC lab’s certification last year amid allegations of irregularities: falsified bacteria data report, invalid sampling, false reporting, and lack of qualified personnel to oversee the laboratory.

This resulted in the recent indictment of former CUC manager, Pete Babauta by federal prosecutors in the U.S. District Court. He is charged with conspiracy to defraud the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The decertification has prevented CUC from conducting its own water sample analysis.

CUC had to hire a private company, Quality Water Inc. , to do the water analysis on a regular basis.

DEQ said lately that CUC has made significant progress in complying with prescribed regulations.

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Airport sewerline now operational

The Saipan International Airport will now be serviced with a full sewerline system after the Commonwealth Ports Authority and the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. completed the off-airport sewerline project that began almost eight years ago.

While the project hit snags due to funding problems not associated with the airport facilities and issues of ownership between CPA and CUC, the new sewerline system will provide the needed disposal of waste to the proper waste water treatment facility at Agingan Point.

The sewerline system provides waste disposal services to all tenants and companies on airport property and to over 1,000 local residents situated along the sewerline areas.

“The longstanding concern about the airport’s septic and leaching field contaminating the

ground water at the airport no longer exist. The question as to when the hundreds of residents along the airport and As Lito roads will be hooked to a much needed sewerline system is now gone,” said John R. Sablan, CPA’s overall engineer. “This project accomplishes so much for Saipan by providing a long overdue waste disposal service to the airport and nearby residents, but also it now protects our environment.”

The project was first undertaken by the In 1996, the CPA began construction in 1996 to provide of a new sewerline system for the Saipan International Airport. Issues have been raised by local and federal agencies regarding the threat of contaminating the ground water at the airport where nearly 70 percent of Saipan’s water aquifer is situated.

The project was 100 percent financed by local CIP tax-ex-

empt bond proceeds funds from CPA. However, the FAA raised concerns over CPA financing the entire project when only 30 percent of the project is related to the airport while 70 percent will serve the residents along the roads. After much discussion with CUC, and the CPA and CUC agreed to hold joint ownership of the project. The CPA paid for 30 percent of the cost while CUC was responsible for the remainder. Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC).

Because of FAA’s concern and issues over the percentage of ownership, the project dragged on for several years.

Other issues that contributed to delays in completing this project include It took eight years for this project to be completed in its entirety, with construction disputes over issues like complications with the lift

stations and right-of-way issues with landowners. issues holding the project back this long. Fortunately, CPA and CUC, along with the contractor, Pacific Drilling Ltd., were so committed to see that this project is carried out to full completion. have finished this long anticipated project.

The total project cost is \$6,282,262.00, inclusive of the design and construction management services.

The project, in general consisted of installing a complete sewer system from the Saipan International Airport along Tun Herman Pan Road, downward to Shell Dan Dan Gas Station and all the way south along As Lito Road to Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant.

It included the installation of pipes, valves, fittings, manholes, bar screens, valve boxes, lift stations and emergency backup generators.

Final inspections were performed on May 10, 2004, by both CPA and CUC, conducted inspections of inclusive of the lift stations. It was then commissioned upon satisfactory performance of the project. The entire sewerline system project is going to be closed out and will be officially transferred to CUC for operations and managing maintenance.

“We thank CUC for their commitment not only to CPA and the airport community but to all the residents in the area. Without such commitment, it would be extremely difficult to imagine the project making any progress. The contractor, PDL, also kept its promises and hung in there with us ‘til the end,” said Sablan.

In addition to the sewer system, CPA constructed an aircraft waste disposal system on airport premises to provide on site disposal of avoid the transporting of aircraft waste instead of into using the public sewer manholes along the main roads..

The aircraft waste disposal facility is a building on airport premises and is hooked up to the newly completed sewerline system. It This project consisted of constructing on of a building for the specially designed aircraft disposal system and asphalt paving of an access road leading to the building. This project was fully funded by CPA for approximately \$230,000. The system was then to be connected to the sewerline system upon completion. On May 11, 2004, CPA performed conducted the final testing and training sessions on May 11, 2004 to the airport tenants and airline personnel who will be involved in the operations of this new facility. system.

With the completion of these two projects and the tremendous value and safeguard it provides to the environment, anticipated efficiency they will provide, CPA and CUC expressed themselves “extremely proud” of the final outcome of the their projects. Both agencies promised to continue to and strive for more improvements to continue to enhance the overall infrastructure of the CNMI.

guangdong

nikko

Most of Continental's flights in March arrived on time

Business

Joeten celebrates 55 years of service

By **JOHN RAVELO**
REPORTER

Fifty-five years ago, the late Jose Tenorio and his wife Soledad put up a small mom-and-pop store in Chalan Kanoa, a venture that would eventually catapult itself to one of the biggest locally owned conglomerate in the Northern Marianas.

Clarence Tenorio Jr., one of the couple's grandsons, today cherishes the legacy his grandfather left on the islands. His father, J.C. Tenorio Enterprises president Clarence Tenorio Sr., was just an infant when the Tenorio couple established the mom-and-pop store in 1949.

As head buyer for the company—popularly known as Joeten—Clarence Jr. said that being part of the business became indispensable in his life, associating his growth with the company's phenomenal expansion.

"It's part of my life," Clarence Jr. said. "It's an obligation to maintain the business," adding that he would like the clan's fourth generation to witness and eventually manage a much bigger Joeten company in the future.

Joeten celebrates its 55th anniversary beginning today, lining up a series of promotions to thank customers who have patronized its stores over the years.

"We're a local company and we've been here for 55 years. We're not going anywhere and it's in our best interest to provide the people of the CNMI the best quality products at reasonable prices," said Clarence Jr.

Joeten department stores

general manager Mike Troup said the company anniversary celebrations would kick off today, offering selected items at discounted prices.

Troup said all Joeten stores are participating in the anniversary sale, including the department stores and supermarkets in Supe, Garapan, Dandan and Chalan Piao. Joeten's Ace Hardware stores would also participate in the anniversary celebrations.

"We'll kick off the anniversary sale with free T-shirts for the first 200 customers, free balloons for the kids. On the supermarket side, there will be tastings and samplings," Troup said. Joeten's vendors would be present at the stores to join the celebrations, he added.

On Saturday, Joeten will be having an "Early Bird Sale" from 7am to 11am. Troup said customers who buy products from Joeten during the sale period could have big savings through special price discounts. The event will be broadcast live on a radio station.

Troup said the anniversary celebrations would run for a month, and that other promotional activities would be scheduled and announced very soon. These events include the Moonlight Madness Sale and the Customer Appreciation Sale.

"Joeten has been successful for 55 years. We want to continue growing and improving," Troup said.

He said Joeten can make available in the CNMI any product that a customer would look for. One of Joeten's new line of products is suitable for those with diabetes, a common

illness on the islands. These products include lotion, anti-itch medication, and mouthwash, among others.

Troup said Joeten continues to look for products that other local stores do not have. "Let us know [the product you want] and we can find it for you," he said.



J.C. Tenorio Enterprises president Clarence Tenorio Sr., seated, and Joeten department stores general manager Mike Troup announce the promotional activities by Joeten stores as the company celebrates its 55th anniversary beginning today.

JOHN RAVELO

ctsi-joeten

World oil prices at 13-year high

MELBOURNE, Australia (Radio Australia/PIR)—World oil prices have surged to a new 13-year high.

New York's reference light sweet crude for June delivery climbed 24 cents, to US\$40.30 per barrel.

Prices are at the highest level since October 1990, when Iraq rolled into Kuwait ahead of the 1991 Gulf War.

The new surge in prices came as the International Energy Agency called on suppliers to pump more crude, saying booming economic growth around the world is spurring demand for oil at the fastest rate in 16 years.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, meanwhile, says it may meet next week to discuss the pos-

sibility of raising the cartel's output quotas in a bid to help cool prices.

Meanwhile, Air New Zealand has joined other international carriers in imposing a fuel surcharge to cover a jump in the cost of jet fuel.

Passengers flying across the Tasman flights will pay nearly US\$10 extra each way as Air New Zealand moves to recoup jet fuel costs, which have risen by more than 60 percent in the past year.

Airline spokesman Glen Sowry says it's been a difficult decision to increase costs in a competitive market.

"We have many, many airlines operating into and out of New Zealand and something that we're acutely aware of."

Pacific competes for China's tourists

Officials in the Marianas region are in hot pursuit of the latest holy grail of Asia: the Chinese tourist. Within a few years, their numbers are projected to match the number of Japanese tourists visiting the region, according to a report in *The New York Times*.

Reports have it that Beijing would allow Chinese group tourism to Saipan, which got China Southern Airlines' twice-weekly charter flights from Shanghai, starting last month.

Guam Gov. Felix Camacho was quoted in the report as being "glum," over this development but he assured that his government is moving to catch up.

"We have seen them moving

very aggressively," Camacho told *The New York Times*. Referring to Beijing's plan to give "approved destination status" to Saipan this summer, he added, "We are moving as quickly and aggressively to get it for ourselves, too."

The report said that all across the Pacific, even in Japan, officials are vying to net the wealthy Chinese tourist, seen as the big-spending successor to the Arab tourists of the 1970's, fueled by oil dollars, and the brandaholic Japanese shoppers of the 80's and 90's.

In fact, China and Japan traded places as tourism powers last year, according to statistics



Camacho

from the two countries. About 15 million Chinese tourists traveled overseas, a 47 percent jump from the previous year com-

pared with 13.2 million Japanese, a 19.5 percent decline.

"The numbers are overwhelming," the paper quoted Pacific Island Club-Guam general manager Bartley A. Jackson as saying. "If just 1 percent of the population can afford to come to Guam or Saipan, that is a tremendous market to draw from."

The Chinese now dominate or account for a large slice of foreign tourism in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

They are also starting to flow into more expensive destinations like Japan and Hawaii.

The *New York Times* report credits the forecasts of growth

China to attend South Pacific tourism meeting

PAPEETE, Tahiti (Tahitipresse/PIR)—China will be participating in the 14th Annual South Pacific Tourism Ministers Council meeting scheduled to be held in Tahiti in October.

This will be China's second major involvement in the South Pacific this year, having become the 13th member of the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) on April 21.

The yearly South Pacific Tourism Ministers Council meeting offers an occasion to make an annual report on the region's tourism activities, Bruno Peaucellier, the head of the French Polynesia government's international relations department, told Tahitipresse on Monday.

The council's meeting a year ago, in the Cook Islands, gave its agreement in principle to China becoming the 13th member of SPTO.

The other 12 SPTO members are Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Robert Wooton, Cook Islands prime minister, is head of the South Pacific Tourism Ministers Council, which once held a brief meeting in Tahiti in 1997. Among the 12 regional countries, French Polynesia has the second biggest yearly tourism volume after Fiji.

This will be the first time French Polynesia has hosted the yearly meeting.

in Chinese tourism on China's booming economy and two crucial moves by the government last fall to placate the growing middle class: instead of just a restricted pool of residents of Beijing, Shanghai and Guanzhou, residents of about 100 second-tier cities also were allowed to travel abroad. The government also increased the amount of foreign exchange a person may take out of the country, to \$6,000 from \$2,000.

Hong Kong is bracing for the arrival this year of 11.5 million Chinese tourists, part of a forecast increase in overall tourism to Hong Kong by a third, to 20.5 million. To cope, Hong Kong officials have debated converting cruise ships and public housing into temporary hotels.

In 2003, Saipan and the rest of the Northern Mariana Islands received 15,213 Chinese visitors.

No agreement yet on hiking Saudi output

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—OPEC members have not reached agreement over a proposal by Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil producer, to hike output by 1.5 million barrels per day from the current ceiling of 23.5 million, the cartel's president said Thursday.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries will discuss this measure in an informal meeting in the Netherlands next week, said Purnomo Yusgiantoro, who is also Indonesia's energy minister.

Members will also discuss changing OPEC's current preferred price band of US\$22-28, he added.

"OPEC is very concerned with the current high oil prices, and we'll try to avoid the same global recession as what happened in 1973," Purnomo told a news conference in Jakarta.

OPEC's reference basket of seven crude oils rose is currently trading well above that band at around \$36 a barrel.

Crude prices have risen steadily in recent weeks, settling above \$40 a barrel this week on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

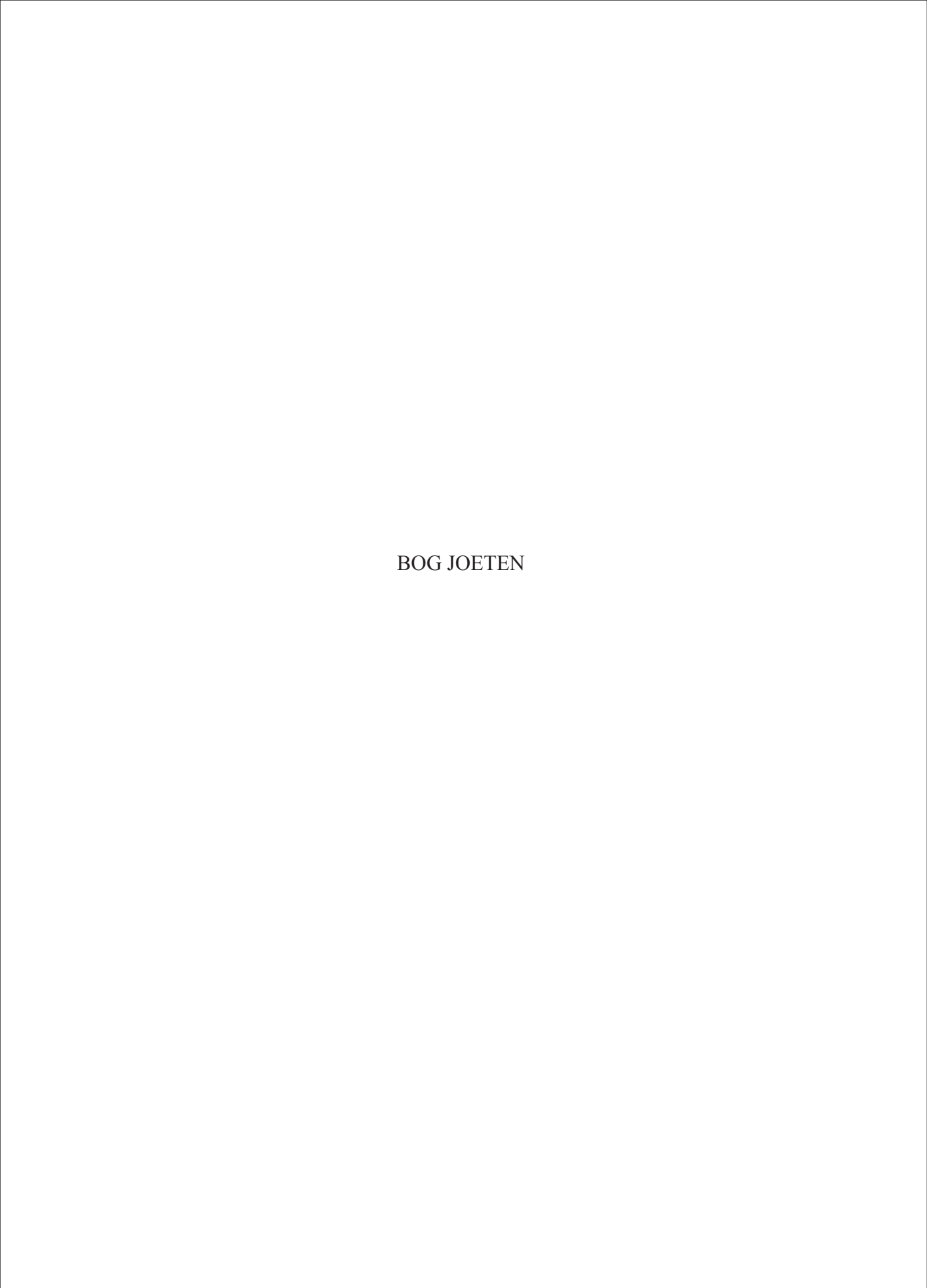
In recent days, oil prices have reached 13-year highs. OPEC, which pumps a third of the world's oil, has said it would consider a Saudi proposal that the group raise its production ceiling in a bid to cool the market.

But Purnomo said the causes for the current price spike were out of OPEC's control. OPEC officials argue that there is little they can do, citing geopolitics and a tightness in U.S. gasoline stocks for driving high prices.

Many member nations are already pumping all the crude they can to cash in on current high prices. Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de facto leader, is the only member with significant capacity to pump more oil from existing fields.

The growth in demand for crude continues to outstrip expectations, the International Energy Agency said in its monthly oil market report.

Given China's thirst for imported oil and the soaring demand for gasoline and jet fuel in industrialized countries, the agency revised its 2004 demand forecast upward to 80.6 million barrels a day—an increase of 2.5 percent over last year.



BOG JOETEN

Trade deficit soars to record \$46 billion

By JEANNINE AVERSA
AP WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—The United States posted a record trade deficit in March, reflecting Americans’ voracious demand for foreign-made goods as well as the most expensive crude oil since 1983.

The \$46 billion deficit reported Wednesday by the Commerce Department represented a hefty 9.1 percent increase from February’s imbalance and came despite the fact that U.S. exports climbed to an all-time high in March.

“The economy is shifting into high gear and we’re vacuuming up goods from around the world to support that growth,” said Joel Naroff, president of Naroff Economic Advisors.

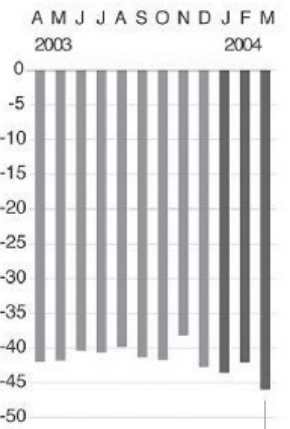
Imports of goods and services came to a record \$140.7 billion in March, representing a 4.6 percent increase from the previous month. The strengthening U.S. economy stoked demand for imports. But the weaker value of the U.S. dollar, which makes imported goods more expensive in the United States, also played a factor in pushing up the total value of imports, said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com.

Exports, meanwhile, totaled \$94.7 billion, also their best month on record. That marked a 2.6 percent advance from February. Exports were helped out by the weaker dollar, which makes U.S. goods cheaper for foreign buyers, and some

U.S. trade

Here is a look at the U.S. trade deficit.

Seasonally adjusted



SOURCE: Department of Commerce AP

In March, imports of automobiles and parts came to \$19 billion, a record. Imports of consumer goods, including TVs, toys and clothing, totaled \$31.3 billion, also an all-time high.

The United States’ \$5.6 billion trade deficit with oil-producing countries, including Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, was the highest on record. The average price of imported crude oil rose to \$30.64 a barrel in March, the highest since February 1983, another factor in the swollen trade gap.

U.S. exporters, however, posted gains. Exports of U.S.-made cars and parts totaled \$7.2 billion in March, a record. U.S. exports of consumer goods,

including pleasure boats and tobacco products, also registered all-time highs in March, as did U.S. sales of industrial supplies.

“This is very good news indeed for manufacturers, who account for 80 percent of all goods exports,” said David Huether, chief economist at the National Association of Manufacturers.

Hardest hit by the 2001 recession, manufacturers, which have seen millions of jobs evaporate, are finally getting back on firmer footing. Over the last three years, they have had to cope not only with hard economic times at home and abroad but have also had to compete with a flood of imports.

America’s politically sensi-

tive deficit with China widened to \$10.4 billion in March. But U.S. exports to the country totaled a record \$3.4 billion.

U.S. manufacturers contend that China is deliberately undervaluing its currency, the yuan, by as much as 40 percent, giving that country a big trade advantage when competing with U.S. companies.

The Bush administration has been pressing Beijing to stop linking its currency to the dollar and to let the value of the yuan be set in open markets.

Last month, the administration announced that it would not launch unfair trade investigations into China’s currency practices and alleged violations

of labor rights—a decision that drew criticism from Democrats and some Republicans in Congress who represent states that have suffered big losses of factory jobs.

Instead, the administration said it would continue to pursue a strategy of diplomatic engagement with China on the currency matter and on opening its markets more to U.S. companies.

March’s big trade gap may mean that the economy’s 4.2 percent growth rate for the first quarter of this year could be lowered, economists said. The government’s second estimate of first-quarter GDP is released on May 27.

New study shows big drop in books sold

NEW YORK (AP)—Not even Harry Potter could prevent a big drop in book sales in 2003.

With a struggling economy and competition for time from other media, 23 million fewer books were sold last year than in 2002, according to a report issued Wednesday by the Book Industry Study Group, a non-for-profit research organization.

Sales fell to 2.22 billion books, down from 2.45 billion in 2002. The decline was in both hardcovers and paperbacks, in children’s books and general trade releases. Even sales of religious titles, often cited as a growing part of the publishing industry, were flat.

“We believe this is due to a variety of factors, the biggest being the used book market,” said Albert N. Greco, an industry consultant and a professor of business at the graduate school of Fordham University.

“People are looking for bargains, especially in college textbooks, where we believe millions of used books are being bought. Also, books are competing with magazines, cable, radio, music and movies.”

Thanks to higher prices, net revenues did rise to \$27.8 billion in 2003, a 2.5 percent increase. They are projected to reach \$33.5 billion in 2008.

But the 2003 figures show a continued trend of increasing production and declining demand. More than 100,000 books were published last year, yet fewer people were buying them. Sales dropped despite such high-profile releases as “Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix,” the memoirs of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Dan Brown’s religious thriller, “The Da Vinci Code.”

“One book cannot make you,” Greco said. “You have to look at how many books are not selling well. There’s a parallel to Hollywood, where a lot of movies flop.”

The Book Industry Study Group’s report, titled “Book Industry Trends 2004,” includes several downbeat assessments from publishing officials. Bob Miller, president of Hyperion, declares that “the pie we’re all looking to share is not growing,” and “flat is the new up.”

HYUNDAI
CMYK

Gap admits overseas workers mistreated

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE
AP BUSINESS WRITER

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—In an unusual display of corporate candor, Gap Inc. on Wednesday acknowledged that many of the overseas workers making the retailer’s clothes are mistreated and vowed to improve often shoddy factory conditions by cracking down on unrepentant manufacturers.

The San Francisco-based owner of the Gap, Old Navy and Banana Republic stores made the comments Wednesday in its first ever “social responsibility” report—a 40-page document that mixed contrition about the past with promises to

do better in the future.

“We feel strongly that commerce and social responsibility don’t have to be at odds,” Gap CEO Paul Pressler told a small gathering of shareholders Wednesday at the company’s annual meeting.

As the company strives to hold its overseas suppliers more accountable, Gap is uncovering thousands of violations at 3,009 factories scattered across roughly 50 countries. “Few factories, if any, are in full compliance all of the time,” the report said.

Workplace activists who have long chided Gap for making its clothes at so-called “sweatshops” praised the merchant for shedding light on rampant

abuses that have been haunting the clothing industry for years.

“We think this goes far beyond the public relations fluff that other companies put out a lot of the time,” said Bob Jeffcott, policy analyst for the Maquila Solidarity Network, a workers’ rights group in Toronto. “By making some very candid admissions, they are taking an important first step toward cleaning up the problems.”

Gap’s commitment is particularly significant because the factories supplying the merchant may employ 300,000 workers combined, estimated Bruce Raynor, president of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees. “We have

had our differences with Gap in the past and probably will again, but this is something that deserves to be applauded.”

Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world’s biggest company and a frequent target of sweatshop critics, plans to review Gap’s report to get ideas on how it might improve conditions at the factories supplying its merchandise, said company spokesman Bill Wertz.

“Hopefully, this will be a wake-up call for Wal-Mart,” Jeffcott said.

Gap’s report provides a geographic breakdown on the workplace violations uncovered by a team of more than 90 inspectors.

The most frequent problems cropped up in China—a country that is expected to play an increasingly prominent role in the world economy.

Of the 241 China factories rated by Gap last year, 73 plants received the company’s two lowest grades—“needs improvement” or “immediate attention required.”

The listed troubles covered in the Gap report included psychological or verbal abuse—something that Gap said occurred at between 10 percent and 25 percent of the China factories that supply the company.

Unacceptably low pay is an especially widespread problem throughout the world, according to the Gap’s statistics. The issue is becoming an increasingly thorny topic, with U.S. labor and political leaders arguing the country is losing thousands jobs as cost-conscious companies export work to take advantage of cheaper wages in other parts of the world.

Between 25 percent and 50 percent of the inspected

factories supplying Gap from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean paid their workers below the minimum wage at some point last year. Between 10 and 25 percent of the factories in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and South America shortchanged their workers, the report said.

Gap orders manufacturers to address all violations, including substandard pay, when the problems are discovered, said Anne Gust, the company’s chief administrative and compliance officer.

If a factory repeatedly violates the rules, Gap said it dumps the offending manufacturer. Gap cut its ties with 136 factories last year, including 84 in China and Southeast Asia. The company pledged to become even more vigilant in its resolve to improve factory conditions.

“We believe that garment and other manufacturing workers around the world deserve better than reality that many unfortunately face,” the Gap report said.

Tax refunds bigger this year but smaller than predicted

By EILEEN AMBROSE
THE BALTIMORE SUN

Taxpayers on average received refunds this spring that were about 5 percent higher than a year ago—far short of the double-digit percentage increases that some forecasters had predicted.

The average tax refund as of the end of April was \$2,063, up \$98 from the year before, the Internal Revenue Service reported Monday. As of last week, Uncle Sam had returned \$180.1 billion to the nation’s taxpayers.

That’s about \$21 billion higher than they were at the same time a year ago, but billions below the \$37 billion increase that the Treasury Department predicted for the season, said Richard DeKaser, chief economist with National City Corp. in Cleveland. Still, the refunds should result in a meaningful bump in consumer spending, he said.

Some forecasters had projected refunds would be 20 percent or higher this year because of last year’s tax cuts, which reduced rates on ordinary income as well as on dividends and long-term capital gains.

TaxBrain, an online tax service, predicted last November that the average refund for 2003 would be \$2,552, a 29 percent increase over the prior year. And the Treasury Department in February said the average tax refund this spring would be \$300 higher than if last year’s tax cuts hadn’t been adopted.

What happened?

Economists and tax experts point to a variety of reasons why refunds came under expectations.

One likely culprit is the alternative minimum tax, economists said.

The AMT, a parallel tax system, was created decades ago to ensure the rich paid taxes. Filers pay either regular income tax or the AMT, whichever provides the most money for Uncle Sam. But because the AMT was never adjusted for inflation, more middle-income families are ending up paying it.

And, while regular income tax rates were lowered last year, the AMT’s rates stayed the same, increasing the number of taxpayers who ended up owing the AMT.

“Fundamentally, the size of the tax cut wasn’t as big as we thought it was” because of AMT, said David Wyss, chief economist with Standard & Poor’s in New York.

Sung Won Sohn, chief economist with Wells Fargo & Co. in Minneapolis, said many workers saw an increase in income as the economy picked up last year. Their tax withholdings might not have been enough to cover their bigger tax burden, so their refunds were lower, he said.

Eric Hayes, a senior tax analyst with TaxBrain, said his refund projections included the \$400 increase in the child tax credit, which was refunded in advance to millions of filers last summer. He added that there are still millions of tax returns outstanding, and once they are factored in, the average refund amount will get a boost.

Some said the projections were just far too rosy.

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Nation

Lawmakers: New abuse photos are even worse

By PAULINE JELINEK
AP WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—The abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. troops went beyond the photos seen by most Americans, shaken lawmakers said Wednesday after viewing fresh pictures and video that they said depicted forced sex, brutality and dogs snarling at cowed prisoners.

Some members of Congress said they feared that making the images public would inflame international outrage and endanger Americans still in Iraq. The private screening of more than 1,600 photos in a top-secret room of the U.S. Capitol came one day after Islamic militants announced they had beheaded an American in Iraq to avenge abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison.

“I don’t know how the hell these people got into our army,” said Colorado Republican Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell after viewing what he called a fraction of the images.

“I saw cruel, sadistic tor-

ture,” said Rep. Jane Harman, D-Calif., who said some of the images were of male prisoners masturbating. She said she saw a man hitting himself against a wall as though to knock himself unconscious.

Others said they saw images of corpses, military dogs snarling at cowering prisoners, women commanded to expose their breasts and sex acts, including forced homosexual sex.

“There were people who were forced to have sex with each other,” said Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y.

Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., said, “There were some pictures where it looked like a prisoner was sodomizing himself” with an object. He said blood was visible in the photograph.

Not everyone reacted the same way to the additional photos.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said he thought “some people are overreacting.”

“The people who are against the war are using this to their political ends,” he said.

The private screening marked the latest turn in a scandal that has prompted President Bush to apologize to the victims and Democrats to demand the dismissal of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld.

Many of the photos appeared to include the same small group of soldiers who were in pictures that had already been made public. And pictures of abuse were mixed in with travelogue-type photos.

Some questionable photos appeared to have nothing to do with prisoners, including several that lawmakers believed were of sex between male and female U.S. troops.

The pictures on three discs were shown to lawmakers in the form of a slide show. Many said the images were difficult to decipher.

Shortly before the viewing began, Rumsfeld defended military interrogation techniques in Iraq, rejecting contentions that they violate international rules

See LAWMAKERS on Page 26

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Families hail GIs facing court-martial

ROSELLE, N.J. (AP)—Family members of the two latest servicemen to face courts-martial in the Iraq prisoner abuse scandal defended the soldiers Wednesday, saying the allegations are inconsistent with the men they know.

Sgt. Javal “Shawn” Davis of Maryland, 26, and Staff Sgt. Ivan L. “Chip” Frederick II, 37, of Buckingham, Va., are the second and third soldiers ordered to stand trial in the abuse. No trial date has been set.

In the charge sheet, Frederick was accused of having taken part in forcing a prisoner to stand on a box with wires placed on his hands —a scene

displayed in one of the photos that broke open the scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison. Davis’ lawyer said his client is not accused of involvement in any of the photographs depicting humiliation of Iraqi prisoners.

Jonathan Davis says his son, a devout Baptist who grew up in New Jersey, keeps a Bible near him at all times and frequently reads it in order to try and remain calm as he faces the possibility of up to 10 years of hard labor if convicted.

“I want everybody to know

that Shawn is a great American hero who risked his life and volunteered to go to Iraq knowing he might never return,” attorney Paul Bergrin told The Associated Press on Wednesday. “He felt compelled to serve his country based upon 9-11, and the propaganda and political statements pertaining to the state of Iraq.”

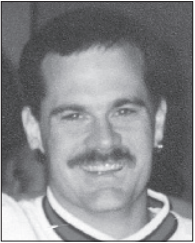
Frederick’s uncle, William W. Lawson, of Newburg, W.Va., said the family expects Frederick to plead innocent although they had not yet heard from him or his attorneys about the court-

martial order. He said his nephew “is still in good spirits.”

His mother, Jo Ann Frederick, of Oakland, Md., learned of the court-martial order from a reporter. She declined to comment on the case but said her son’s attitude was upbeat as far as she knew.

“I had a positive e-mail from him today but at the time he wrote that, I’m sure he hadn’t heard that news,” she said.

Davis and Frederick have been charged with conspiracy to maltreat detainees, dereliction of duty for failing to protect detainees from abuse and maltreatment of detainees. Davis also faces a charges of rendering false of-



Frederick II

England’s lawyer says military uncooperative

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. (AP)—The lawyer for an Army private facing a court-martial for being photographed with naked Iraqi prisoners said Wednesday the military is not providing information he needs to mount an adequate defense.

To illustrate his point, attorney Giorgio Ra’Shadd held up dark, nearly black photocopies of images turned over to him by military authorities. Outlines of nude men could be seen in some of the pictures. Some apparently do not include his client, Pfc. Lynndie England.

England, a 21-year-old reservist from West Virginia, faces a court-martial on charges such as conspiracy to maltreat prisoners and assault consummated by battery. If convicted, she would face punishment ranging from a reprimand to more than 15 years in prison.

No date has been set for a hearing in the case.

Ra’Shadd said he has received copies of statements England made to military

police in Iraq. But he added that it is impossible for him to issue subpoenas because the military has not released the names of the civilian intelligence officers who England says ordered her to appear in the photos.

“You have to allow people to defend themselves,” Ra’Shadd said from a motel near Fort Bragg, where England has been stationed since returning from duty in Iraq in March.

Master Sgt. Ken Heller, a spokesman for the 18th Airborne Corps based at Fort Bragg, said he was not able to immediately respond to Ra’Shadd’s accusations.

The charges against England stem from photos that show her with Iraqi prisoners. In one, she smiles, with a cigarette in her mouth, as she points at the genitals of a naked, hooded Iraqi. Another photo taken at Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib prison shows her holding a leash that encircles the neck of a naked Iraqi man lying on his side.

also played on the football team. He has been in the reserves nearly seven years and has previously served tours in Egypt and Bosnia. Prior to his deployment he lived in Maryland with his wife, Zee-nethia, who is in the Navy, and their children.

LAWMAKERS

From Page 25

and may endanger Americans taken prisoner.

Rumsfeld told a Senate committee that Pentagon lawyers had approved methods such as sleep deprivation and dietary changes as well as rules permitting prisoners to be made to assume stressful positions.

Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also noted that the rules require prisoners to be treated humanely at all times.

Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill. said some of the approved techniques “go far beyond the Geneva Convention,” a reference to international rules governing the treatment of prisoners of war.

The Defense Department is conducting multiple investigations into prisoner abuse.

Lawmakers were given three hours to see the photos and videos in top-secret rooms at the Capitol. The photos remained in the custody of the Pentagon as the administration tried to decide whether to release them to the public.

In the past two weeks a handful of photos have been made public

along with an Army report that found numerous “sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses” at the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison complex near Baghdad.

In Wednesday’s viewing, briefers from the Pentagon’s Criminal Investigation Division conducted the sessions sought by the Senate Armed Services Committee, which has had two hearings into the abuses that have caused an international firestorm.

Committee Chairman John Warner urged before the photos were shown Wednesday that lawmakers use caution in describing them publicly.

“I think we’ve got to be extremely cautious ... not incite in any way further anger against our forces or others working in the cause of freedom,” the Virginia Republican said on the Senate floor.

He said he didn’t think they should be released to the public until trials of the troops begin to protect the legal process and avoid “inspiring the enemy to inflict further damage.”

Myers said the military has taken steps to correct the problems, including replacing the military police unit that took some of the photos.

cosmos-joeten

Bush defends education programs, funding

BETHESDA, Md. (AP)—President Bush defended his education record on Wednesday, saying his insistence that schools demonstrate improvements in student performance in exchange for federal money is building better school systems.

“I have seen incredible progress” and “my job as president is to continue to challenge,” Bush told an audience of educators and state officials gathered at the National Institutes of Health.

“I am incredibly optimistic that we are getting it right” in providing resources to the nation’s schools, he said.

Democratic rival John Kerry and congressional Democrats say the president is short-changing his own education programs.

The Bush administration and congressional Republicans have “reneged on their commitment” to fund the president’s education reform law, No Child Left Be-

hind, said Maryland Rep. Steny Hoyer, in a written statement issued to coincide with Bush’s visit to the Washington suburb.

“You can’t have strong schools with the president’s weak education budget,” added Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., who helped craft the legislation with Bush.

Democrats say the adminis-

tration’s current budget funds No Child Left Behind at \$9.4 billion below the figure authorized.

House Democrats have proposed an alternative budget that would provide \$22.7 billion more than Bush’s budget over the next five years.

Bush said the funding is adequate and his programs are working. He

promoted the administration’s “Reading First” program with curriculum developed in part from NIH research into why millions of students cannot read up to their grade level.

So far, the “Reading First” initiative involves 73,000 teachers, more than 1 million students and a commitment to spend \$5 billion over five years, Bush said.

Kerry’s campaign said the Bush administration has cut

other federally backed reading programs, including one supported by the president’s mother. The administration says it is redirecting funds to higher-priority programs.

Bush’s re-election campaign also focused on education Wednesday, launching a Spanish-language television ad asserting that Bush has a steady commitment to education reform while Kerry has taken ever-changing positions on the issue.



Bush

Religious study may cut prison violence

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—Officials are crediting religious studies with cutting inmate violence at a prison routinely torn by race-based gang attacks.

To date, 440 medium-security inmates at Sierra Conservation Center have participated in the program based on the best-selling book, “The Purpose Driven Life,” by the Rev. Rick Warren.

The participants represent about a third of the unit’s 1,200 inmates, about 125 of them serving life sentences.

The book has 40 chapters; participants read one each day, reflecting on and discussing the relevance to their lives. Warren’s church in Orange County has donated the books, Bibles, study materials and videos.

“We couldn’t go more than two weeks without a lockdown or without one gang attacking another,” said Hector Lozano, who coordinates the prison’s substance abuse treatment programs. “This got people talking together, as opposed to having one group charge another group.”

The first 200 inmates completed the program in April 2003.

During the previous year, there were five riots, 103 violent incidents, four staff assaults, 1,226 inmate disciplinary reports and five lockdowns.

In the year since, there was one riot, 67 violent incidents, four staff assaults, 1,067 inmate disciplinary reports and one lockdown.

The religious program “has definitely played a role,” said prison spokesman Lt. Kenny Calhoun. He also credited the prison’s staff.

The inmates formed a non-denominational church, Sierra Christian Center, and give sermons in English and Spanish. They set up a table in the exercise yard on what they’ve designated “holy ground,” where Christians and non-Christians gather to worship.

“It took off like wildfire,” Calhoun said.

Sept. 11 panel writes to al-Qaida leaders

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Sept. 11 commission has submitted written questions about the 2001 attacks to al-Qaida detainees and expects to receive responses soon, the panel’s vice chairman said Wednesday.

Under an arrangement negotiated with the Bush administration, the bipartisan panel has access to classified intelligence reports on government interrogations of the detainees in U.S. custody, Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman, said in an interview.

After reviewing them, the commission came up with questions for the detainees to try to fill in gaps regarding the hijacking plot, he said.

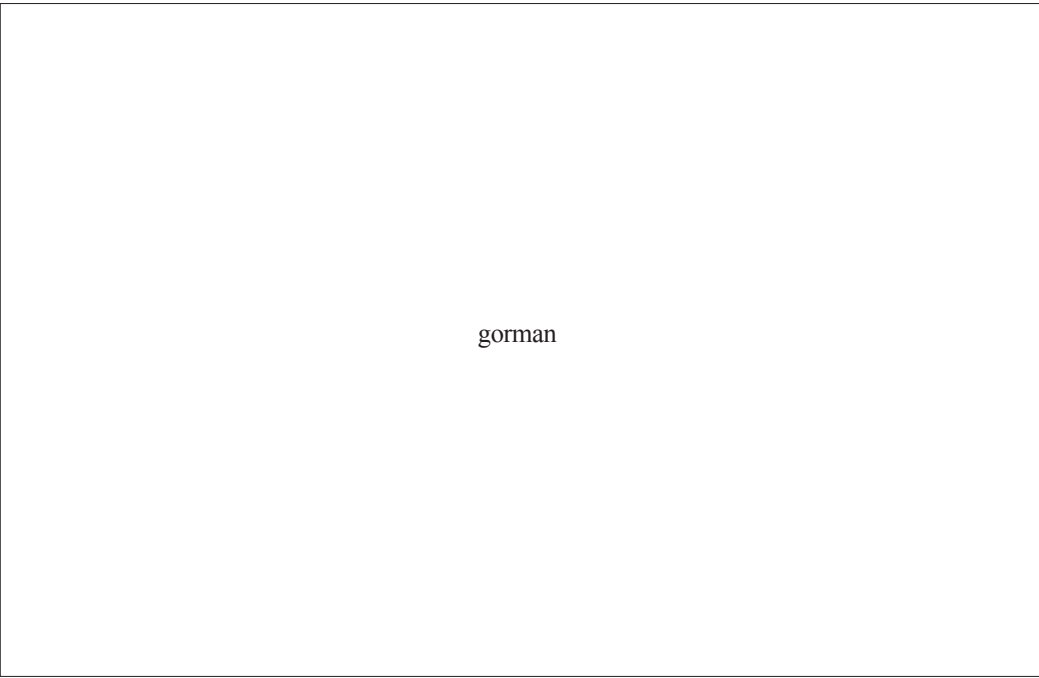
Hamilton declined to characterize the nature of the information the panel sought or which

al-Qaida members it targeted. The commission in the past has expressed interest in getting information from Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind, and other suspected leaders behind the attacks.

Hamilton said he expects the responses will arrive soon.

“We believe the information that we have obtained from this process will be discussed in our final report,” he said.

Zacarias Moussaoui, charged as a conspirator in the Sept. 11 attacks, has also sought information from al-Qaida detainees. Moussaoui has asserted that other prisoners will back up his claim that he was not involved in planning the attacks, although he has indicated he was to be part of a subsequent al-Qaida operation.



gorman

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World

Asia

Opposition warns of revolt in Philippines

By JIM GOMEZ
AP WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—The party of opposition presidential hopeful Fernando Poe Jr. warned Wednesday of another “people power” revolt if he’s cheated of the presidency—fighting words in a nation where popular protests have knocked two leaders out of office.

Polls and surveys showed the count from Monday’s election race going in different directions. With both sides coming close to claiming victory after a bitterly fought contest, some kind of confrontation appeared likely.

Even though official results aren’t expected for weeks, a confident President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo called a Cabinet meeting to start delivering on her campaign promises.

A statement from Poe’s KNP party said a repeat of “people power”—the mass protests that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and President Joseph Estrada in 2001—“will surely come out” if the vote count is tainted with fraud.

Arroyo took over for Estrada midway through his term but now is seeking her own six-year presidency.

A nationwide survey by a reputable independent pollster has projected that Arroyo will beat challenger Fernando Poe Jr. by 41 percent to 32 percent. But a “quick count” by an officially sanctioned election watchdog group showed Poe ahead 43.7 percent to 33.4 percent. The count covered only 1.8 percent of the precincts.

Fresh election-related violence broke out in the north when gunmen attacked two town halls, killing a policeman and burning ballots in some of the worst incidents since Monday’s polling, police said Wednesday.

A powerful bomb exploded Wednesday on southern Jolo island, killing at least one person and injuring 14 near a building where ballots were being counted. Men burned a municipal building on nearby Basilan island in an attack related to the elections. A vice mayoral candi-



Poe

date in southern Maguidanao’s Parang town fatally shot an aunt of his rival, police said.

Poe’s camp has alleged widespread election irregularities, and he has urged his backers to “remain firm in our belief in the truth that victory is ours.”

Arroyo’s office said she called a Cabinet meeting for Friday to begin “work on her governance agenda.” That includes promises to create 1 million jobs over the next six years, as well as plans to provide power to more homes, loans to small businesses and cut-rate medicine for the poor.

Three other presidential contenders were trailing badly as the Philippines waited for an official count expected to take weeks as workers tally tens of millions of paper ballots by hand. The elections also were for vice president, lawmakers and provincial and local officials.

Filipinos voted Monday without any major disruption, but at least 115 election-related deaths since December have made this campaign season deadlier than the 1998 presidential campaign—when 67 were killed.

The Philippine military has warned against any violence or massive protests, saying troops would use “necessary force” to maintain order if losing parties try to stir up trouble.

The presidential race has been bitter and full of recriminations. Opposition leaders accuse Arroyo’s side of corruption and plots to rig the vote count. Arroyo’s camp denies the charges and has alleged that Poe’s backers want to disrupt the results with violence.



Philippine army soldiers carry ballot boxes as they relocate them for counting to the central Philippine city of Cebu, following the killing of the Madridejos town police chief by a Philippine Army soldier Wednesday May 12, 2004.

AP

WESTCO-JOETEN

Filipino killed in attack on base in Iraq

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—One Filipino worker was killed and four were injured in a mortar attack on a U.S. military base north of Baghdad, Philippine officials said Wednesday.

Earlier, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, quoting the Department of Foreign Affairs, said four Filipino workers were killed at Camp Anaconda near Balad which came under mortar attack on Tuesday.

“It was a stroke of bad luck that they were exposed and unprotected at the time of the attack,” Arroyo said in a statement.

There are 1,300 Filipinos working inside Camp Anaconda, she said.

“We would like to confirm that there was only one Filipino killed in



Arroyo

the attack,” Foreign Undersecretary Jose Brillantes told reporters.

Brillantes said Manila’s top diplomat in Baghdad traveled to Balad and later told him the initial death toll was incorrect.

“I guess we will have to follow

the DFA on that. We would be glad if it turns out there are fewer casualties,” said Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye.

He identified the fatality as Raymund Natividad, a warehouse personnel in his late 20’s.

In her statement, Arroyo said that if 4,000 Filipino workers in Iraq “cannot be adequately secured, they must be transferred or evacuated to safer areas. This must be made clear to the employers and authorities concerned.”

Arroyo directed the Foreign Affairs Department to reassess the security of Filipino workers employed in American military installations in Iraq.

“We cannot allow Filipino lives to be placed at wanton risk

in a situation where unpredictable attacks are rife,” she said, adding that the attack took place “despite assurances that the safety of Filipino civilian workers in Camp Anaconda has been ensured by newly built, protective underground bunkers.”

Brillantes said the Filipinos on the base were employed by the Dubai-based company Prime Projects International, which is under contract to the U.S. military.

U.S. officials in Baghdad had no immediate comment on the attack.

Last month, a Filipino truck driver became the country’s first fatality in Iraq, but Arroyo, a staunch U.S. ally, said the government had no plans to pull out its 41 soldiers, police and health workers.

US to free about 20 Pakistanis in Gitmo

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP)—The United States has agreed to release about 20 Pakistanis from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba, and the men will return home later this month, a senior Pakistani official said Wednesday.

Brig. Javed Iqbal Cheema, director-general of the National Crisis Management Cell at the Interior Ministry, said he was told about the releases when he went to Washington last week to take up the issue with the U.S. authorities.

“The U.S. officials are holding more than 40 Pakistanis in Guantanamo Bay, and we understand that about 20 out of them will return home by the end of this month,” Cheema told The Associated Press.

Cheema coordinates with the United States on counterterrorism issues. He gave no other details, including on what would happen to the remaining Pakistanis.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said Wednesday it had no immediate information about planned releases of Pakistani prisoners.

Hundreds of Pakistanis went to Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in America to help the Taliban fight against U.S.-led forces.

Some were caught by the U.S. forces and sent to Guantanamo Bay to investigate their links with the Taliban and al-Qaida and are among more than 600 men from 44

countries being held there.

However, Pakistan is a key ally of the United States in war on terror, and has itself captured more than 500 al-Qaida and Taliban suspects on its soil. Many of them have been handed over to the United States.

Pakistan has said the Pakistani men detained at Guantanamo Bay were not members of al-Qaida, and that they had gone to Afghanistan in response to calls by Muslim clerics, who at the time were urging people to wage “jihad” or “holy war” against America.

U.S. officials classify the captives at Guantanamo Bay as unlawful combatants and say important intelligence is still being gleaned in interrogations.

Cheema’s comments came as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Christina Rocca, was visiting Pakistan for talks with government leaders on the war against terrorism, and to visit U.S.-aided projects in northern Pakistan.

Rocca was scheduled to meet with President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali, and senior Foreign Ministry officials on Wednesday.

Since Pakistan threw its support behind the U.S.-led war on terrorism, it has deployed, for the first time in its history, more than 70,000 Pakistani forces in its tribal regions along the border with Afghanistan to root out militants.

Reports: China orders writer detained

SHANGHAI, China (AP)—China has ordered a pro-democracy writer detained for two years without trial, possibly over his writings on sensitive political issues, rights groups reported Wednesday.

Liu Shui was detained May 2 and sent the next day to the Xili Detention Center in the southern city of Shenzhen, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists and the Association of Independent Chinese Writers.

Liu was sentenced to remain at the center for two years of “custody and education,” a sentence handed out for minor crimes without a trial or formal charges, the groups said.

The Sweden-based writers’ association said Liu had been accused of “violating regulations on public order,” but gave no details. New York-based CPJ said Liu was picked up with a friend and accused of soliciting prostitution. It said the friend was later released.

Both groups said they believe Liu may have been detained over essays posted on overseas-based Chinese-language Web sites. Those included calls for political reforms, the release of political prisoners and a

reassessment of the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989.

“CPJ is very concerned that authorities may have arrested Liu in retaliation for his recent writing on sensitive topics,” the group said in a statement.

A woman who answered the telephone at the Xili Detention Center said Liu wasn’t being held in her wing, but refused to give details or her name. Calls to the center’s administrative offices rang unanswered.

Liu was earlier jailed for more than four years for taking part in the 1989 pro-democracy movement and then authoring a book challenging the Communist Party’s claim that the protests were an organized plot to overthrow the government.

Hundreds, possibly thousands, of people were killed when tanks and troops were sent in to clear protesters from the square on the night of June 3-4, 1989. The government has never allowed a full investigation or accounting of the victims.

Chinese dissidents say police have tightened surveillance of them in the run-up to this year’s 15th anniversary of the crackdown.

dfs-joeten

North Korea proposes high-level talks



AP
An elderly Chinese man walks briskly past a paramilitary officer on duty outside the North Korean embassy in Beijing, China, Thursday, May 13, 2004.

By JAE-SUK YOO
AP WRITER

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea on Wednesday proposed holding high-level military talks with South Korea on May 26 aimed at reducing tension centered on the international standoff over the communist state’s nuclear weapons development.

In a telephone message, the North suggested that officials meet on the border Friday to work out the proposed high-level talks, the South’s Defense Ministry said.

The North proposed holding the high-level talks May 26 at its east coast Diamond Mountain resort, it said.

The South did not have an immediate response, but it has repeatedly urged the North for such high-level military talks.

Seoul had hoped to hold the talks this month to discuss ways of avoiding naval skirmishes along the poorly marked western sea border as fishing boats jostle for position during crab-catching season in May and June.

North Korean fishing boats have occasionally crossed into waters controlled by South Korea during crab season.

North and South Korea fought deadly naval gunbattles in the western sea in 1999 and 2002. South Korea said several sailors were wounded, and that up to 30 North Koreans died in the 1999 clash. In 2002, one South Korean warship sank, killing six of its sailors. The North said it suffered casualties, but didn’t confirm how many. South Korea recognizes a sea

border demarcated by the United Nations after the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. North Korea has never recognized it and claims a boundary farther south. The two Koreas often claim intrusions by the other side’s naval ships and fishing boats.

Also Wednesday, a South Korean report said Pyongyang demanded aid in exchange for freezing its nuclear weapons program as it began low-level talks with the United States and four other nations.

The Yonhap News Agency, citing unidentified diplomatic sources, reported that North Korean envoys said the success of the low-level talks would depend on whether the United States. Also taking part are China, South Korea, Russia and Japan.

The “working group” talks are meant to help produce an agenda for a third round of high-level talks on the North’s nuclear ambitions, which host Beijing hopes takes place before July.

Even as envoys from the six nations sat down to talk, the North Korean government unleashed more vitriol from Pyongyang, with the newspaper Rodong Sinmun accusing the United States of using the nuclear issue as a pretext for war.

“It is a false propaganda to claim that the U.S. is a ‘friendly country,’” said the commentary, carried on North Korea’s official KCNA news agency.

Whether the rhetoric—typical for the isolated North—would set the tone for the negotiations was unclear. Host China has said North Korean leader Kim Jong Il expressed his commitment to the talks and to a “nu-

clear weapon-free goal” when he visited Beijing last month.

On Wednesday, “North Korea renewed its reward-for-freeze demand and warned that the success of the talks will depend on whether the United States accepts its demand or not,” Yonhap said.

The United States and its allies say they are willing to provide aid if North Korea freezes its nuclear facilities and commits itself to dismantling them. Washington says such a freeze must be a temporary step toward permanent dismantling.

North Korea has balked at making such a commitment, and insists on aid and a freeze taking place simultaneously.

ere was no immediate comment from the U.S. delegation.

The dispute erupted in October 2002 when the United States said North Korea’s isolated Stalinist regime admitted operating a secret nuclear program in violation of a 1994 agreement.

Going into the latest meeting, North Korea promised “patience and magnanimity” but warned of unspecified “very serious consequences” if Washington presses its demand to dismantle the program without discussing aid.

The State Department says its envoy, Joseph DeTrani, might hold a rare one-on-one meeting with North Korea’s delegate during the talks at a Chinese government guesthouse.

No date has been set for the end of the meeting but U.S. officials say they expect it to last several days.

In Seoul, South Korea’s foreign minister said the talks will focus on two issues: making the Korean Peninsula nuclear weapons-free and taking “corresponding measures” for a North Korean freeze.

“We hope that the countries involved in the talks will avoid confrontational attitudes and get down to deep and concrete talks on the key issues,” said Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon.

The North, however, took a tough stance on the eve of the Beijing talks.

“The ‘reward for freeze’

should be taken up as a major agenda item at the working group meeting,” Pyongyang said in a statement carried by its state news agency.

“If the U.S. turns aside this and takes the meeting as an opportunity to insist on” a complete dismantling, “that will entail very serious consequences,” the statement said.

Though it gave no details, the North says it is pushing ahead with developing a “nuclear deterrent” needed to avert what it says is the possibility of a U.S. invasion.

North and South Korea are technically still at war since the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended without a peace treaty.

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World

FBI: Agents advised Berg to leave Iraq

By ROBERT H. REID
AP WRITER

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)—U.S. authorities said Wednesday a young American who was beheaded by militants had been warned by the FBI to leave Iraq and was offered a plane ride to safety at a time when a new wave of violence spread across the country, making road travel extremely dangerous.

Mystery surrounded not only Nicholas Berg’s disappearance but also why he had been held by Iraqi police for about two weeks and questioned by FBI agents three times. Berg’s family disputed U.S. officials’ claims that Berg was never in U.S. custody.

“The Iraqi police do not tell the FBI what to do, the FBI tells the Iraqi police what to do. Who do they think they’re kidding?” Berg’s father, Michael, told The Associated Press from his home in West Chester, Pa., a Philadelphia suburb.

Berg was last in contact with U.S. officials in Baghdad on April 10, and his body was found Saturday in Baghdad. Staff members at the \$30-a-night Al-Fanar Ho-

tel in Baghdad told the AP that Berg stayed there for several days until April 10.

Two e-mails sent by Berg to his family and friends show the 26-year-old telecommunications expert traveled widely and unguarded throughout Iraq—an unsafe practice rarely done by Westerners.

The FBI warned Berg shortly before his disappearance that Iraq was too volatile a place for unprotected American civilians but he turned down a State Department offer to fly him home, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Michael Berg said his son refused a U.S. offer in early April to board an outbound charter jet because he believed travel to the airport was too dangerous. American soldiers refer to the airport highway as “RPG Alley” because of frequent attacks by insurgents firing rocket-propelled grenades.

According to the State Department, Berg told an American diplomat in Baghdad that he preferred to travel on his own to Kuwait.

“At that time, the U.S. consular officer extended an offer to assist Mr. Berg to depart Iraq



This is a image made from a video posted Tuesday May 11, 2004 on an Islamic militant Web site affiliated with al-Qaida showing a group of five men wearing headscarves and black ski masks standing over a bound man in an orange jumpsuit, who identified himself as Nick Berg.

by plane to Jordan,” said State Department spokeswoman Kelly Shannon. “We’d already discussed that possibility with his family, and we mentioned

that to him, obviously, when we talked to him on the 10th.”

His family said Berg had already intended to leave the country on March 30 but that

his detention prevented him from doing so.

Berg first worked in Iraq in December and January and returned in March. He was inspecting

communications facilities, some of which were destroyed in the war or by looters.

During his time in Iraq, he struggled with the Arabic language and worked at night on a tower in Abu Ghraib, a site of repeated attacks on U.S. convoys and the location of the notorious prison where U.S. soldiers abused Iraqi inmates.

Michael Berg told the AP that Nicholas’ paternal aunt, now dead, married an Iraqi man named Mudafer, who became close to Nicholas. In one of the e-mails, Nicholas Berg describes going to the northern city of Mosul, where he introduced himself to Mudafer’s brother, identified as Moffak Mustaffa.

“We got along splendidly,” Berg wrote. “We spent a few hours and I helped him establish an e-mail account.”

Berg notes that “my presence ... made him more concerned (about his own safety and probably mine too) than I’ve been the entire time I’ve been here.”

The young man was beheaded on a video posted Tuesday on a Web site. It bore the title “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi shown

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shell

2 more Americans charged in abuse case

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)—Two more American soldiers have been ordered to stand trial in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt announced Wednesday.

Sgt. Javal Davis, 26, of Maryland and Staff Sgt. Ivan L. “Chip” Frederick II of Buckingham, Va., were ordered to undergo a general court-martial, Kimmitt said. He said the trial date and venue had not been set.

Spc. Jeremy C. Sivits, of Hyndman, Pa., goes on trial May 19 before a special court-martial, which cannot levy as severe a sentence as a general court-martial.

Davis has been charged with conspiracy to maltreat

detainees, dereliction of duty for failing to protect detainees from abuse, maltreatment of detainees, rendering false official statements and assault.

Frederick has been charged with conspiracy to maltreat detainees, dereliction of duty for negligibly failing to protect detainees from abuse, maltreatment of detainees, and wrongfully committing an indecent act by watching detainees commit a sexual act.

In the charge sheet, Frederick was accused of having taken part in forcing a prisoner to stand on a box with wires placed on his hands—a scene displayed in one of the photos that broke open the abuse scandal.

The charge sheet says that the prisoner was told he would be electrocuted if he fell off the box, although the wires were not connected to a power source.

Frederick was also accused of forcing naked detainees into a pyramid position and photographing the scene. He was also alleged to have ordered detainees to masturbate in front of other prisoners and guards and then “placing one in a position so that the detainee’s face was directly in front of the genitals of another detainee” to simulate oral sex while photographing them.

Davis allegedly forced detainees into a pile “and jumped on” them, the charge sheet said. He was also accused of having stepped on pris-

Blair: Prisoner abuse claims ‘damaging’

LONDON (AP)—Prime Minister Tony Blair said Wednesday that the scandal over prisoner abuse in Iraq “has been immensely damaging” but claimed all complaints about British troops had been addressed.

Blair also said that photos allegedly showing British troops threatening and urinating on an Iraqi prisoner, published by the Daily Mirror newspaper, “were almost certainly fake.”

The Daily Mirror has not withdrawn its allegations. “If the prime minister believes these photographs are fake, then we ask him to produce conclusive evidence to that effect,” the newspaper said.

A report released Tuesday by Amnesty International listed only one case of a civilian death that was not already known to the government, Blair told the House of Commons.

“Any abuse by any coalition forces is completely unacceptable,” Blair said. “What is not true is that allegations were made and nothing happened in respect of them.”

The human rights group said the military had failed to investigate many cases in which British soldiers killed civilians in Iraq, including an 8-year-old girl, and that the inquiries they did undertake were too secretive.

oners’ feet and having struck one detainee “in anger.”

Davis was also accused of lying to an investigator about such inci-

dents, the charge sheet said.

According to the same report, Davis told Army investigators he was “made to do various things that

I would question morally.”

He also told investigators that military intelligence personnel appeared to approve of the abuse.

FBI From Page 37

slaughtering an American,” referring to an associate of Osama bin Laden believed behind a wave of suicide bombings in Iraq.

In Washington, Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it was likely that al-Zarqawi himself was “the lead perpetrator.” Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian, is wanted in the killing of an American diplomat in Jordan in 2002 and is suspected of ordering many suicide bombings in Iraq.

U.S. spokesmen Dan Senor and Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt were quick to offer statements of condolence to his family and to draw attention to the barbarity of his death. Senor also said that “to my knowledge” Berg was not affiliated with any U.S. or coalition organization, nor was he ever in U.S. custody.

However, Senor said Iraqi police arrested Berg in Mosul on March 24 because local authorities believed he may have been involved in “suspicious activities.”

Senor refused to say more, citing the sensitivity of the case. But he did confirm that the Americans were aware Berg was in custody.

“U.S. authorities were notified,” he said. “The FBI visited Mr. Berg on three occasions and determined that he was not involved with any criminal or terrorist activity.”

In a statement, the FBI said that its agents “encouraged him to accept (the) ... offer to facilitate his safe passage out of Iraq. Mr. Berg refused these offers.”

Berg was released April 6 and checked into the Baghdad hotel.

Senor referred questions about the reason for Berg’s detention to the Iraqi police. In Mosul, however, police told the AP they had no knowledge of the Berg case. Police official Safwan Talal said the only American arrested there in recent months was a woman who was released soon afterward.

Since Iraq remains under U.S. military occupation, it seems unlikely that the Iraqi police would have held Berg, or any other American, for such a length of time without at least the tacit ap-

proval of U.S. authorities.

Berg told his family that U.S. officials took custody of him soon after his arrest and he was not allowed to make phone calls or contact a lawyer, his father said.

Kimmitt said U.S. forces kept tabs on Berg during his confinement to make sure he was being fed and properly treated because “he was an American citizen.”

But the three FBI visits suggest American authorities were concerned about more than Berg’s well-being. They may have had their own suspicions about what the young American was doing in Iraq.

During a briefing Wednesday, Senor confirmed that Berg had registered with the U.S. Consulate in Baghdad but insisted he “was not a U.S. government employee, he has no affiliation with the coalition and to our knowledge he has no affiliation with any Coalition Provisional Authority contractor.”

He also stated that Berg “was at no time under the jurisdiction or detention of coalition forces.”

However, in a Jan. 18 e-mail, Berg said his company had been announced as an approved subcontractor for a broadcast consortium awarded a contract for the U.S.-controlled Iraqi Media Network.

“Practically, this means we should be involved with quite a bit of tower work as part of the reconstruction, repair and new construction of the Iraqi Media Network,” he wrote, referring to the network as “something like NPR in the U.S.”

It was unclear whether the contract was revoked.

FBI agents visited Berg’s parents March 31 and told the family they were trying to confirm their son’s identity.

On April 5, the Bergs sued the government in federal court in Philadelphia, contending that their son was being held illegally. In a writ filed April 5 in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia, the Bergs said the State Department told them their son “is currently detained in Mosul, Iraq, by the United States military” and that American diplomats “no longer” had “any authority or power to intervene” on his behalf.

mobil



AP

An Iraqi man tries to recover a dead body in the center of Karbala, 110 km south of Baghdad, Iraq, Wednesday, May 12, 2004.

US troops battling fighters in Karbala

By HAMZA HENDAWI
AP WRITER

KARBALA, Iraq (AP)—U.S. tanks, helicopters and jets attacked fighters loyal to a radical Shiite cleric in this holy city Wednesday, partially destroying a mosque used by insurgents and setting seven hotels ablaze. Twenty-two militants were killed.

The cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, urged his followers to resist and compared their struggle to the Vietnam War in his first news conference since the standoff began more than a month ago.

American forces killed 22 militants, and six coalition soldiers were wounded, U.S. Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said in Baghdad. Four of the soldiers returned to duty.

Iraqi leaders in another holy city, Najaf, discussed how to peacefully resolve the confrontation between al-Sadr and the U.S.-led coalition, which is seeking to arrest al-Sadr in the murder of a rival cleric. Coalition officials have said they welcome efforts to work for a peaceful solution, even though they will not negotiate with the cleric and want him to face justice.

Half of the Mukhaiyam mosque in Karbala was destroyed in the fighting. Most shops in Tal al-Zeinabiya, a central market, and three ambulances and two military vehicles also were destroyed.

Fighting subsided by dusk as the call for evening prayers spread across Karbala from loudspeakers at the Imam Hussein mosque, one of the most sacred shrines of Shia Islam.

Iraqi guards manned the shrine gates to prevent al-Sadr's fighters from entering. Explosions and machine-gun fire continued intermittently as night fell. Fighters pushed a wounded comrade down a street on a pushcart. Jets flew overhead as militiamen took up new positions near another holy site, the Imam Abbas shrine.

Al-Sadr's fighters acknowledged they lost control of the Mukhaiyam mosque, less than a mile from the Imam Hussein shrine.

"We put up a very stiff resistance," said Ameer Latif, a 30-year-old militiaman. Another fighter, Amar Haider, leaned against a wall with his Kalashnikov rifle and said: "God willing, we shall still be victorious."

Late Wednesday, three explosions resounded in Najaf, and residents said U.S. forces appeared to be making an armed incursion into the city. At least one civilian was killed and another was wounded, Iraqi authorities said.

Al-Sadr is holed up in Najaf. He met with reporters there Wednesday—his first press conference since his militia, the Al-Mahdi Army, launched attacks on coalition troops in Baghdad and other cities in early April.

"I appeal to the fighters and mujahedeen in Karbala to stand together so as none of our holy sites and cities are defiled. We are prepared for any American escalation and we expect one," al-Sadr said.

"Let remind you of Vietnam," the young cleric said. "We are an Iraqi people that has faith in God, and his prophet and his family. The means of victory that are available to us are much more than what the Vietnamese had. And, God willing,

we shall be victorious."

Al-Sadr also referred to the abuse of Iraqi detainees by U.S. troops at Saddam Hussein's notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

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CARRIER

NASA weighs robotic mission to aid Hubble

By GUY GUGLIOTTA
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON—Early this year NASA had all but written off the Hubble Space Telescope, but today a robotic mission to replace worn-out batteries and gyros, and even to install new instruments, suddenly seems so doable that the agency is likely to ask for proposals to do the job in early June.

“I’m not saying it’s a done deal,” said Edward Weiler, NASA associate administrator for space science. “A lot of water needs to go under the bridge, but it’s looking a lot better than it did two months ago.”

NASA will have to decide within seven months whether to make the trip, because it needs three years to prepare a mission by the end of 2007, when Hubble’s batteries are expected to give out: “If we haven’t made a decision (this year), we’ll lose the option,” Weiler said.

In an interview at NASA headquarters, Weiler said the Goddard Space Flight Center received 26 responses to a Feb. 20 “request for information,” inviting ideas for a robotic servicing mission. Goddard, in Greenbelt, Md., near Washington, is responsible for the telescope’s engineering and maintenance.

The replies came from individuals, government agencies, specialty contractors and aerospace giants such as Lockheed Martin, and they offered such schemes as rendezvous and docking, software modification, and robotic repair and servicing.

“There was no one silver bullet, no one right answer,” Weiler said. “I was skeptical ... but ... the technologies we need are out there.”

The proposals include the University of Maryland’s “Ranger,” a 25-foot sticklike robot that is tall enough to stand on a platform moored to Hubble and use its two mechanical arms to open up and reach

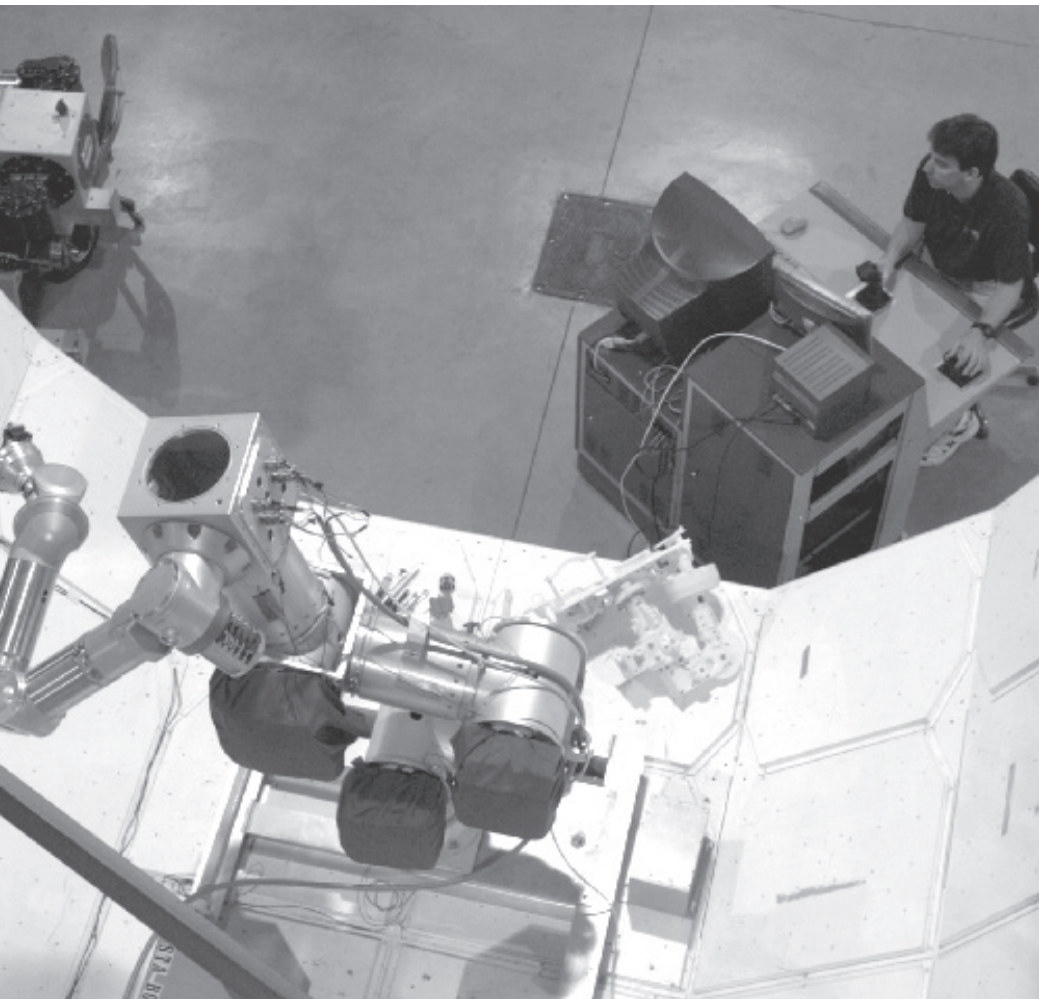
every module and door on the telescope’s bottom half.

The Canadian Space Agency’s Special Purpose Dexterous Manipulator or “Dextre,” has two 10-foot arms that pivot around a central “torso.” The Canadians designed it to assist “Canadarm,” the robotic arm in use aboard the international space station.

And NASA’s own Johnson Space Center, in Houston, is developing “Robonaut,” a humanoid robot with five-fingered hands and human-size arms whose eventual purpose is to replace astronauts during spacewalks.

Weiler said Goddard expects to decide by June 1 whether to formally request bids on a robotic mission. He said he did not know whether NASA would choose one contractor or several, run the project itself or seek a private-sector partner.

“I suspect they’re going to pick and choose to come up with a synthesis that’s better than any of the individual plans,” said



THE BALTIMORE SUN
Research engineer Brian Roberts operates the Ranger robot at the Space Systems Laboratory in College Park, Md. A space-certified Ranger is 70 percent built, the lab’s director says.

aerospace engineer David Akin, who leads the Ranger project at the University of Maryland’s Space Systems Laboratory. “It’s the same with every mission—the devil’s in the details.”

Five months ago, there were no details. NASA Administrator Sean O’Keefe on Jan. 16 canceled Hubble’s fourth servicing mission, saying the shuttle could not fly to Hubble and still comply with new safety measures recommended after last year’s Columbia disaster.

The decision provoked a

national outrage from Hubble devotees. In March, O’Keefe asked the National Academy of Sciences to reassess servicing options, including a shuttle mission. The academy’s findings are expected in late summer.

“I think the outpouring of public support helped NASA realize how important it is to keep Hubble’s productivity at a high level,” said Steven Beckwith, director of NASA’s Space Telescope Science Institute, which sets Hubble’s science agenda. Beckwith said he still

hoped for a shuttle mission, but he acknowledged “great interest” in a robot that might be able to install new instruments.

Still, it will be risky. “You can’t underestimate the complexity and the dangers,” said former astronaut Jeffrey Hoffman, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology aerospace engineer who made three spacewalks to repair Hubble in 1993. “Suppose you open a door but can’t put in the new instrument. Now you’ve got a light leak, and you’ve lost your telescope.”

Why pups resemble owners

Anyone who has spent time in a park has probably been struck by how often dog owners seem to resemble their pets.

So researchers in California decided to try to test the idea: Do people really resemble their dogs? If so, is it because people tend to pick dogs that look like themselves? Or do dog and person somehow grow to look more and more alike with the passage of the years, just as husbands and wives often seem to?

“It has been asserted, by children’s book-illustrators, at dog shows, and by strangers passing on the street, that people often bear a striking resemblance to their pets,” wrote Michael M. Roy and Nicholas J.S. Christenfeld of the University of California at San Diego in the May issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

The researchers photographed 45 dogs and their owners at three dog parks and gathered information about the breeds and how long owners and pets had been together. They then asked

28 students to try to match the people to the pooches.

The students were able to match dogs to their owners, but only when the dogs were purebred.

“The results suggest that when people pick a pet, they seek one that, at some level, resembles them, and when they get a purebred, they get what they want,” the researchers wrote. “A nonpurebred puppy’s final appearance is unpredictable, and so the resemblance ... should be confined to the much more predictable purebreds.”

There was no relationship between how long owners had lived with their dogs and the chance that their appearances would match.

“These results were consistent with the notion that the ability to match is due to selection rather than convergence,” they wrote. “However, it does appear that, as in the case of selecting a spouse, people want a creature like themselves.” (*The Washington Post*)

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Science & Technology

Life & Style

In Hollywood, it's hip to be gray

By ELAINE DUTKA
LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD—There's a hot new special effect headed for the multiplexes this season: the summer movie that appeals to grown-ups.

Hollywood's usual summer lineup of over-the-top car chases, fiery explosions and gross-out comedies this year also will feature adult thrillers, a social satire, a musical portrait of the composer Cole Porter and even a couple of Oscar hopefuls.

Hollywood isn't abandoning its beloved 18- to 24-year-olds, who account for the "repeat" business that keeps the industry afloat. But it is rolling the dice, releasing substantive fare such as Jonathan Demme's "The Manchurian Candidate" and Steven Spielberg's "The Terminal" into a high-stakes summer—a season when, as the saying goes, "every day's a Saturday" because the kids are not in school.

"All you hear at cocktail parties is that there's nothing to go and see," said ThinkFilm distribution chief Mark Urman. "Anyone saying that this summer, however, is just plain

lazy. If it's not the 'revenge of the grown-ups,' it's certainly 'the revenge of talent.' Hollywood is starting to acknowledge the salability of quality."

Among the offerings from the major studios: a remake of "The Stepford Wives," the Cole Porter portrait "De-Lovely," the latest Robert Ludlum adaptation, "The Bourne Supremacy" and Michael Mann's "Collateral," in which a cabdriver picks up a passenger (Tom Cruise) who turns out to be an assassin. "The Manchurian Candidate," a modern-day take on John Frankenheimer's 1962 Cold War classic, is the kind of film traditionally released in the fall. But on July 30, the Paramount Pictures release will go head-to-head with "The Village," another chilling, other-worldly offering from M. Night Shyamalan ("The Sixth Sense").

Even the big popcorn movies this summer are carrying some extra heft, with heavy-duty directors such as Alfonso Cuarón at the helm of "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" and Sam Raimi on "Spider-Man 2."

In a time of flat ticket sales, adults older than 40 increasingly are viewed as an "underserved" audience—if not of the scope of the evangelical Christian segment that showed up for Mel Gibson's "The Passion of

the Christ," still likely to turn out when the material is there. "Something's Gotta Give," a romantic comedy whose protagonists have a combined age of 125, has taken in a hefty \$125million domestically, with much of the audience composed of baby boomers.

According to the Motion Picture Association of America, the number of moviegoers 50 to 59 rose 20 percent between July 2002 and last July, making them the fastest-growing segment in the market. Even among "frequent moviegoers," who head for theaters at least once a month, the over-40s are nearly one-third of the pie (compared with 42 percent for the 12-24 bracket.) Still, they apparently were bypassed by the studios last summer when the "majors" served up only "Matchstick Men," the Oscar-nominated "Seabiscuit" and "The Italian Job," a lightweight heist film

"The Clearing," a thriller with Robert Redford, Helen Mirren and Willem Dafoe. A healthy crop of documentaries also is part of the mix, including "Festival Express," featuring footage of the Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin that should strike a chord with baby boomers.

"The mid-20th century until now has been ours," said Jack Foley, 53, president of distribution for Focus Features. "And Hollywood is finally getting it."

Boomers now are called "zoomers," noted Russell Schwartz, president of domestic marketing for New Line Cinema. Now that their children are grown, they have more time and mobility. The influx of adult-oriented material could help retrieve disaffected moviegoers, expanding the marketplace, he said.

Terry Press, head of marketing for DreamWorks SKG, had no qualms about thrusting "The Terminal" and "Collateral" into the summer box office melee. Academy contenders such as "Saving Private Ryan" and winners like "Gladiator" were hot-weather releases, she said, so it's far from virgin territory. Besides, she said, last year's best



Denzel Washington in Paramount Pictures' "The Manchurian Candidate."

that grossed \$100 million, in part, some believe, because of the lack of adult alternatives.

Although last summer's "Finding Nemo" and "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl" scored big with adults—and everyone else—movies such as "The Hulk," "2 Fast 2 Furious" and "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle" were perceived as youth-oriented and stayed off grown-ups' must-see list.

"Part of the problem last year was that adults weren't attracted to the summer 'tentpole' movies"—big films on the studio schedule, said Jeff Blake, vice chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment. "With 'Spider-Man,' 50 percent of our audience was over 25, and we're aiming for that again. Raimi said he set out to make a better movie—not a bigger or louder one."

Independent film companies have always regarded summer as prime time for adult counter-programming. "Whale Rider," "American Splendor" and documentaries such as "Winged Migration" helped fill the void in 2003. And there is a host of star-studded, high-profile entries this year, including "The Door in the Floor," an adaptation of a John Irving novel that stars Jeff Bridges and Kim Basinger, and

picture nomination for "Seabiscuit" proves that the Academy's memory isn't that short—and, given the curtailed Oscar season, it's even wiser to avoid the year-end logjam and spread your movies out.

"Older people have more disposable income than the audience Hollywood chases weekend after weekend," Press said. "Word of mouth carries longer and farther because there's not another adult-oriented movie competing with your movie the next weekend. The industry needs to cultivate a generation with a tradition of theater-going—people who enjoy going out to the movies rather than downloading and file-sharing them."

Donna Bernard, the 57-year-old owner of a women's clothing store, isn't the first person you'd imagine lining up for ultra-violent "Kill Bill Vol. 2"—or for youth-oriented summer movies, for that matter. Still, she's drawn to movies at both ends of the spectrum.

"I enjoy the mix, from independent movies such as 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' to 'Finding Nemo,'" she says. "I'll be in line for 'Shrek' the day it opens . . . and not just because of my grandchildren. I don't care what audience a movie is aimed at, as long as it's entertaining and smart."

cpa



‘Real people, real sharks, no cages’—and a camera

By ERIN AILWORTH
LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD—How-ever scary were the “Jaws” that spooked beachgoers out of the water in summer 1975, that big, hungry great white was mostly mechanical. The sharks menacing a couple in this summer’s low-tech thriller “Open Water” are real.

Writer and director Chris Kentis (“Grind,” 1997) hired shark handlers to chuck chum—chopped-up fish guts—into the ocean. Jaws’ cousins arrived with blood-stained maws and pointy teeth, and then the actors dived in.

The “questionary tale” about a vacationing couple mistakenly left behind in the middle of the ocean during a scuba diving excursion was shot in the Bahamas with a digital video camera for about \$300,000. Kentis edited the movie with Final Cut Pro on a Mac G4, surrounded by drawings of barracudas and sharks done by his 6-year-old daughter, Sabrina. There are no mechanical monsters or computer-generated images.

So if those fins and murky shapes seem a little close, they are. The movie is schedule to hit theaters nationwide in August.

“The swimming with the sharks ... there’s a part of me that didn’t know if I could do that,” said actress Blanchard Ryan, who played Susan, the female lead. “It came down to me not breaking my word rather than being brave.”

“The bottom line is, I was really, really scared,” Ryan said, the opposite of her costar Daniel Travis, who couldn’t wait to shimmy into his wetsuit.

“In the fine tradition of adrenaline junkies, it was a great and exciting adventure for me,” Travis said. “First day, get in the water with sharks.”

Both actors, who appear to be in their 20s or early 30s but re-



Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis in Lions Gate’s “Open Water.”

fused to disclose their ages, said that because of their vantage point in the ocean they never really knew when the sharks were close.

“She’d yell at me to stop kicking her, and I wasn’t,” Travis laughed. But he just went along with Ryan’s assumptions so she would stay in the water.

Ryan said the sharks aren’t what now keep her awake at night.

During filming, the sharks “were in a feeding frenzy, covered with blood—and they had no interest in us,” she said. What gives her nightmares is the thought of “looking at the water at eye-level, bobbing up and down.”

Both actors spent hours in the swelling waves at least 20 miles from shore. The challenge, they said, was staying close to the boat without getting hit by it, as well as being positioned at the correct angle to the camera. Dramamine was in full supply.

“In the later scenes, when it looks like we did some fantastic makeup work, that’s just the effect of marinating in the ocean,” Kentis said.

The movie is based on accounts he and his wife, Laura Lau—the film’s producer—have read in dive magazines. The couple said they have been recreational divers for 11 years.

“It’s interesting to me that we go off to these exotic locales and put our lives, our trust in the hands of strangers,” Kentis said, adding that he and Lau were committed to making the movie as real as possible, without villainizing the sharks. So, but for a flash of fins, the camera pretty much stays on the surface of the water.

“What you can’t see is more scary,” said Lau, 40, who also helped with the camera work. “You really can’t see into the water when you are on the surface.”

Kentis spent a better portion of his days hanging over the side of a boat, his camera encased in a plastic shield he built, so that he was at eye level with his sea-level actors.

“He took every risk we did,” Ryan said. “He was crazy with the sharks. They were biting his camera cases, and he would bang (them) on the nose and wrench it out of [their] mouths.”

What would have been way too close for comfort for most people, Kentis said, is the only way he would have done it. The 40-year-old, whose day job has been cutting trailers for movies such as “Sleepy Hollow” and “The Royal Tenenbaums,” said he is saddened by how often even the simplest things in movies are now computer generated.

cpa

A Troy Story

By JOHN HORN
LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD—When director Wolfgang Petersen finished his last movie, “A Perfect Storm,” he next considered making “Batman vs. Superman,” only to see that sequel of sorts fall apart. Petersen still ended up telling a tale of dueling superheroes. It’s called “Troy.”

Based on “The Iliad” and its 2,700-year-old chronicle of jealousy, pride, cowardice, sacrifice and war, the \$170-million “Troy” is both the ultimate summer movie and one of the season’s trickiest storytelling challenges.

Yes, it features three strikingly hunky male actors (Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom and Eric Bana) in various states of sweaty undress, there are extravagant and bloody battle scenes, you can gaze upon the face (and glimpse the body) that launched a thousand ships, and, to cap it all off, here comes the Trojan horse.

Yet the film, which opens Friday, also must wrestle with the death of its most appealing protagonist and an array of characters who scarcely fit into the Hollywood template of good and evil. All this for a target audience whose first thought upon hearing the name Homer

is likely to be “The Simpsons.”

But if Homer’s “The Odyssey” can be retrofitted into “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” and “Gladiator” can win the best picture Oscar, who’s to say “The Iliad” can’t be remade as a modern blockbuster?

“From the very beginning, that for me was what was fascinating, and that’s what also adds a very modern element to it,” says Petersen, who as a 15-year-old in his native Germany read “The Iliad” in its original Greek. “The characters are flawed. They are complex. They don’t follow old Western movie terms. They are more close to reality of what people are all about, even if they are these larger-than-life characters. Achilles is an extremely modern guy.”

But Homer didn’t specialize in easy, black-and-white narrative delineations. Equally knotty is that his two central heroes—Achilles (Pitt) and Hector (Bana)—ultimately must fight each other, and a friendly tie is not among the possible results. Chances are a whole lot of “Troy’s” audience will be crushed by the outcome.

“We have been trained as a moviegoing audience that when we go to see an epic, you’re going to be rooting for the heroes



Brad Pitt as Achilles in the movie “Troy.”

and whatever their quest is,” says David Benioff, the “25th Hour” novelist who adapted the “Troy” screenplay. “This is a very different story.”

In a number of ways, it’s also a different story than “The Iliad.”

Zeus doesn’t cast thunderbolts from Mt. Olympus, and Aphrodite doesn’t rescue Paris (Bloom) from certain death. Gone too are Homer’s lengthy monologues and any of his Achilles-Patroclus homoerotic themes: Don’t expect “Queer Eye for the Spartan Guy.” Material not included in “The Iliad,” including the famous wooden horse and the fall of Troy, was added to round out the legend.

Benioff is now among Hollywood’s highest-paid screenwriters. His per-script fee exceeds \$1 million, although his asking price when he sold “Troy” in his first-ever pitch meeting with a studio executive was just \$150,000.

Soon after his screenplay was messengered around town a little more than two years ago, “Troy” attracted interest from an array of leading men. “Everybody had read it,” Petersen says. “I had so many actors, a lot of them quite prominent.”

Petersen says his first choice to play Achilles was Pitt, who at the time was planning on starring in “The Fountain” with “Pi” director Darren Aronofsky. Pitt, who hasn’t had this prominent a film role since “Ocean’s Eleven” three years ago, left “The Fountain,” spent a lot of time in the gym, and picked up his “Troy” armor. When Petersen was toying with “Batman vs. Superman,” the filmmaker briefly met with “The Hulk’s” Bana, whom he liked so much he cast him in “Troy.”

As easy as it might have been to cast the film, it was more complicated to translate the sprawl-

ing, 15,693-line epic poem into an understandable 2 1/2-hour movie. The names of some of the film’s characters might be familiar, but the traits of Hector, Achilles, Paris (Bloom) and Agamemnon (Brian Cox) can be as complicated as Andromache (Saffron Burrows) might be unpronounceable.

“Troy” is mostly faithful to that blurry design, even if the filmmakers redacted several of Homer’s more problematic scenes.

As often as not in both Homer and the film, people make decisions for selfish, rather than noble, reasons. The great warrior Achilles isas interested in memorializing himself as he is in fighting for his country. Paris is motivated by beauty, not bravery. Rather than being great leaders, kings prove to be petty and vain.

“I really enjoyed Hector’s predicament,” Bana said. “Clearly he’s brave and noble, but he’s forced to do a lot of things he really doesn’t want to do. I think those kind of characters are really rare.”

When “Troy” opens, Achilles is nowhere near the front lines; he’s snoozing in his tent with several naked women, hung over from what must have been an interesting party the previous evening. At the same time, thousands of Agamemnon’s invading Mycenaean troops are marching into battle against an equal number of Thessalonian soldiers, lead by Triopas.

The kings strike a deal: Rather than fill the plains with their armies’ blood, they each will offer up a single combatant in a winner-take-all duel. Triopas volunteers the colossal Boag-

rius, while Agamemnon offers Achilles, as soon as the reluctant warrior can be awakened. Who do you think wins?

Yet it is lust and vengeance, not violence, that really set the story in motion and start the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The Trojan prince Paris makes off with Helen, queen of Sparta (newcomer Di-anne Kruger), leaving Helen’s husband, King Menelaus (Brendan Gleeson), angry enough to launch 1,000 ships to get her back. Menelaus, his brother Agamemnon and Achilles sail for Troy, whose walls are defended by Paris’ older brother, Hector.

“I just proposed this really ruthless stripping down of the story to the core, which for me was always Hector and Achilles and their inevitable conflict,” Benioff says. “You know one of them is going to die, and you’re not sure which, and you’re also not rooting foreither one.”

Like “Gladiator,” Petersen hopes “Troy” can prove relevant to today’s audiences, despite the chariots and breastplates. For a movie that has so much bloodshed, “Troy” tries, just as Homer did, not to glamorize combat, suggesting it ultimately yields far more victims than heroes.

“People ask us why are these kind of stories being told again, when you go all the way back to when they had some rules of engagement, and they respected them,” says Petersen.

“Conflict is necessary and will be with us as long as mankind exists. But then there was a special system of morality and ethics and honorable behavior in war. Today, it’s more or less gone.”



Orlando Bloom as Paris in Warner Brothers’ “Troy.”

movie station

NBC signs Brokaw to new 10-year deal

NEW YORK (AP)—Tom Brokaw is leaving the anchor chair but not NBC. He signed a 10-year contract Wednesday to remain at the network, largely to produce and narrate documentaries.

Brokaw, 64, is stepping down as anchor of NBC's "Nightly News" on Dec. 1, and will be replaced in that role by Brian Williams.

"To a lot of people that meant I was going to sit around in an old anchorman's home with a lap robe and a drool cup," Brokaw told The Associated Press. "But I never intended to stop working."

He's been an NBC employee since 1966, starting as a reporter at the network's Los Angeles affiliate. Brokaw has been sole anchor of "Nightly News" since 1983 and NBC's main anchor on major news events.

Brokaw will be the first of the broadcast networks' Big Three—with Peter Jennings of ABC and Dan Rather of CBS—to leave that role. All three have been in place for more than two decades.

He already regularly produces documentaries, and said he has four in the works now: on health care, politics, D-Day and a hiker who lost his arm.

NBC's merger with Universal, completed Wednesday, gives Brokaw more outlets. The network already owns CNBC, MSNBC and Bravo, and will add networks like USA and Trio to its stable.

The author of "The Greatest Generation," about the people who fought World War II, Brokaw plans to continue his writing career. He wouldn't talk about future book projects.

"I wrote four books in four years, doing my day job, and produced two or three documentaries a year," he said. "I just don't want to do that again."

The new NBC deal also offers him more personal flexibility if, for instance, he wants to teach at a college for a month or so.

He'll also be an analyst on major breaking news events, the network said.

Brokaw said the first thing he's planning after Dec. 1 is to skip town, in part to give Williams time to establish himself. An avid hiker, Brokaw is taking a trip to the South American region of Patagonia.

The South Dakota native has a second home in Montana, equipped with a soundproof room where he can record voiceovers for his documentaries.

La Toya London voted off 'American Idol'

By CHRISTY LEMIRE
AP ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

NEW YORK (AP)—Another diva bit the dust on "American Idol" with the shocking ejection of La Toya London Wednesday night.

The two singers who received the lowest viewer-vote totals—London and Fantasia Barrino—were considered the favorites to go head-to-head in the finals. They, along with the recently booted Jennifer Hudson, had become known as "The Three Divas."

London kept smiling even as the crowd booed in reaction to her removal from the Fox TV singing competition.

"I just want to thank you so

much, thank you for believing in me," the 25-year-old said before belting out one of her best songs from the series, "Don't Rain on My Parade" from "Funny Girl."

The show's judges were more candid in their reactions.

"I think America got this one wrong this week," Paula Abdul said.

"I think it's a travesty," echoed Randy Jackson.

The judges play an advisory role after helping winnow the field of 70,000 applicants to 32 semifinalists and then, with viewers, to 12 finalists. The audience takes charge from there until the winner is picked.

London's departure leaves three women in the competition:

Besides Barrino, there's Diana DeGarmo and Jasmine Trias.

It looked as if Trias was a goner, and she seemed to suspect as much during Tuesday's episode. Tears replaced the Hawaiian songstress' perpetually sunny smile after judge Simon Cowell made some brutally honest remarks about her singing during the show's disco week.

"I think, Jasmine, you have a lot of thank-you letters to write to Hawaii," Cowell said Wednesday.

It was just as shocking that Barrino—considered one of the top singers all along—had the second-lowest vote total. The judges had criticized one of the songs she chose: Bon-

nie Tyler's "Holding Out for a Hero" from the "Footloose" soundtrack—which, technically, isn't a disco song because it came out in 1984.

But Cowell also had some kind words this week. Having previously said he thought the 16-year-old DeGarmo was too young for the competition, he made a rare reversal: "I'm gonna take that back," he said.

"This was your week," Abdul told DeGarmo.

As for the always-polished London, Abdul had gushed Tuesday: "I'm looking at an American idol."

Among the filler to prolong the tension during Wednesday night's hour-and-six minute broadcast: observations from

"psychic channeler" Kimberly Berg, who reassured the four finalists, "You're being supported not only by the fans but by the universe."

The women also sang a medley of Donna Summer tunes, including "Hot Stuff" and "Bad Girls." The disco diva, who served as a celebrity judge this week, took the stage to sing "Last Dance" and "MacArthur Park."

Wednesday night's episode also marked the triumphant return of Clay Aiken, the runner-up in last season's "Idol" competition who has enjoyed as much fame and success as the winner, Ruben Studdard. Aiken, famous for his geek-to-chic transformation, sang "Fantasy" by Earth, Wind & Fire.

Beyonce, Alicia Keys among BET nominees

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Beyonce, Denzel Washington and Venus Williams are among the nominees for the 2004 BET Awards, which honor musicians, actors and athletes.

The awards, announced Wednesday, are set to air on the black cable network June 29 from the Kodak Theatre. Multiple nominees included Beyonce, OutKast, Usher, Alicia Keys and last year's "American Idol" winner, Ruben Studdard.

Special honors will be doled out to the Isley Brothers, who will receive a lifetime achievement award, and Danny Glover, who will be honored for his humanitarian work. Actress Mo'Nique is the ceremony's host.

The categories and nominees are:

Video of the year: Beyonce with Jay-Z, "Crazy In Love"; Alicia Keys, "You Don't Know My Name"; OutKast, "Hey Ya!"; OutKast featuring Sleepy Brown, "The Way You Move"; Usher with Ludacris & Lil Jon, "Yeah."

Group: Floetry; G-Unit; Jagged Edge; Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz; OutKast.



Beyonce

Male R&B artist: Anthony Hamilton; R. Kelly; Ruben Studdard; Usher; Luther Vandross.

Female R&B artist: Beyonce; Mary J. Blige; Janet Jackson; Alicia Keys; Monica.

Male hip-hop artist: 50 Cent; Chingy; Jay-Z; Ludacris; Kanye West.

Female hip-hop artist: Da Brat; Rah Digga; Missy Elliott; Jackie-O; M.C. Lyte.

Collaboration: Beyonce with Jay-Z; OutKast with Sleepy Brown; Pharrell with Jay-Z; Twista with Kanye West

& Jamie Foxx; Usher with Ludacris & Lil Jon.

New artist: Chingy; Anthony Hamilton; Ruben Studdard; Pharrell Williams; Kanye West.

Gospel artist: Yolanda Adams; Byron Cage; Donnie McClurkin; Smokie Norful; Vickie Winans.

Actor: Laurence Fishburne; Samuel L. Jackson; Bernie Mac; Mos Def; Denzel Washington.

Actress: Halle Berry; Vivica A. Fox; Beyonce; Sanaa Lathan; Gabrielle Union.

Male athlete of the year: Carmelo Anthony; Barry Bonds; LeBron James; Shaquille O'Neal; Tiger Woods.

Female athlete of the year: Laila Ali; Cheryl Ford; Lisa Leslie; Serena Williams; Venus Williams.

Viewer's choice: Beyonce, "Crazy In Love"; OutKast, "Hey Ya!"; OutKast featuring Sleepy Brown, "The Way You Move"; Kanye West, "All Falls Down"; Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz with Ying Yang Twins, "Get Low"; Usher, Ludacris and Lil Jon, "Yeah."

'Law & Order' trio gets renewals

NEW YORK (AP)—Fans of the three "Law & Order" shows can look forward to more—and No. 4. An agreement between NBC and producer Dick Wolf, announced Wednesday, includes pickups through 2005-06 for Wolf's current series, "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," extending them through their 16th, seventh and fifth seasons, respectively.

And it makes official the fourth entry in the franchise, "Law & Order: Trial by Jury," which will premiere at an unspecified time during the 2004-05 season. Previously, Jerry Orbach, a longtime star of the original "Law & Order," was announced as a transfer to the

new series, which is described as "a richly textured drama set entirely in the arena of the courthouse."

Continuing "Law & Order" stars include Sam Waterston and Jesse L. Martin. Christopher Meloni and Richard Belzer are among the "Special Victims Unit" regulars, and Vincent D'Onofrio stars on "Criminal Intent."

All four dramas are filmed in New York.

"Law & Order," which premiered in September 1990 with a cast that included Michael Moriarty, Christopher Noth and Richard Brooks (all long departed), was critically acclaimed but at first struggled to attract an audience.

After a few seasons, it caught on with viewers, becoming not

only a ratings powerhouse (it ranks 13th for the 2003-04 season) but also making history by spawning TV's first "branded" drama spinoffs: "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" in 1999 and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" in 2001.

The series all share a law-enforcement orientation and a gritty, New York look—as well as narration broken up by title cards and a trademark "bawling" sound effect.

Wolf, a former advertising man, has long envisioned "Law & Order" as a flourishing brand.

"A brand extension is always a good thing," he said in 2001, "unless you do something that doesn't live up to the expectations for that brand."

wallace

Persistent boy defeats girl's attempts to block his calls

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I'm having a problem with a boy at school. Somehow he got my home phone number and started calling me. I don't mean he called once or twice; he called once or twice EVERY HOUR for weeks. It got so bad I'd make excuses to get off the phone or have my parents tell him I was out. That didn't stop him. He'd call back every hour or so until midnight or 1 a.m.—when my folks would take the phone off the hook.

Finally, we paid money to get call blocking and blocked his house number. Then he bought a cell phone and started doing the same thing. We blocked that number, so now he goes over to friends' houses and calls.

I'd have no problem telling him to stop, but he has a very big mouth and every time someone disagrees with him, he calls them a racist. I feel helpless for fear he'll spread rumors about me.

TRAPPED IN LOUISVILLE

DEAR TRAPPED: Speak up and tell him to stop calling already! If he persists, your parents should first notify his parents, and if that doesn't work, then notify the phone company and the police. What he is doing is called stalking. Your parents should be prepared to get a court order if necessary, because the boy appears to have an unhealthy fixation.

Please do not worry about his accusing you of being a racist. People who know you will know it's not true.

DEAR ABBY: I have two sisters-in-law. I'm the one who was chosen to write to you. Our mother-in-law, "Lydia," has always treated us like we are women who just happen to live with her sons. She drops over whenever she feels like it, "borrows" whatever suits her pleasure, even if the items belong to us, and refers to the grandchildren as her sons' children.

I have tried explaining to her that we both work, and it takes two incomes to accumulate what we have, and her comments are hurtful. However, knowing she has hit a nerve whenever she drops by uninvited, she makes a point of commenting to me that I'm driving her son's car, using his vacuum cleaner, or on how I'm raising his kids. It's infuriating.

Our husbands make excuses that she's old and doesn't know any better, or say, "That's just Mom." I know you're going to say they have no backbone. So how should we wives handle it? Do we just leave when she shows up? After 20 years of enduring this, we've decided we've earned the right to be just as rude as she is.

HAD IT IN MISSOURI

DEAR HAD IT: The first thing the three of you should do is find a marriage counselor who gives group discounts, and visit the therapist together with your husbands. Ideally, the ones to get Lydia to shape up are her sons. If that proves to be too much for "the boys" to handle, then it's up to you to create some boundaries. Do not be rude—be firm. When she "drops by," greet her with a smile and say, "This isn't a good time to visit. Your son isn't here and I'm busy." Then shut the door and go about your business.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Abby shares more than 100 of her favorite recipes in two booklets: "Abby's Favorite Recipes" and "More Favorite Recipes by Dear Abby." Send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$10 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Cookbooklet Set, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in price.)



Dear Abby

R&B artist John Whitehead shot dead

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—John Whitehead, a prominent R&B artist best known for the 1979 hit song "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now," was shot dead Tuesday, police said.

Whitehead, 55, and another man were working on a vehicle when they were shot by two gunmen, police said. The assailants fled.

Whitehead was shot in the neck and collapsed. Ohmed Johnson, who was shot in the buttocks, was in good condi-

tion early Wednesday, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Police said the gunmen fired a series of bullets; a young neighborhood girl said she heard about a dozen shots. Authorities had no immediate motive or suspects.

"Why did they do this to my dad?" Dawn Whitehead, 33, asked at the scene. "I just talked to him yesterday. ... He was a fun person. Who would want to kill him?"

Gene McFadden, who was

Whitehead's partner in the singing group McFadden & Whitehead, went to the scene in the city's West Oak Lane neighborhood and stood there trembling, WPVI-TV reported.

The two men formed a group called the Epsilons in their youth and were discovered by Otis Redding, touring with the legendary performer in the 1960s, according to their Web site.

The duo wrote several hit songs performed by others in the 1970s, including "Back

Stabbers," "For the Love of Money," "I'll Always Love My Mamma," "Bad Luck," "Wake Up Everybody," "Where Are All My Friends," "The More I Want" and "Cold, Cold World."

"Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now" went to No. 1 on the R&B chart and reached No. 13 on the pop chart. The song became an unofficial anthem for the Phillies as they charged to a World Series championship in 1980 and the Eagles as they reached the Super Bowl in 1981.

Pamela Anderson becomes a US citizen



Pamela Anderson talks with Jay Leno during taping Tuesday, May 11, 2004, of "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" in Las Vegas.

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Pamela Anderson has fame, fortune, fabulous good looks—and now her U.S. citizenship.

Anderson, 36, who was born in British Columbia, underwent an interview and passed a 10-question citizenship test Wednesday. She was then sworn in at a private ceremony, her attorney Barbara Federman said.

"She did fabulous," Federman said.

Anderson moved to California in 1989. Federman would not say why she sought U.S. citizenship. Immigration officials said the actress also retained her Canadian citizenship.

Anderson is currently a columnist for Canadian Elle magazine. She starred on "Baywatch" and has since worked in various films and TV shows, including the animated television series "Stripperella."

She has two sons with her former husband Tommy Lee, a member of the band Motley Crue.

Shriver launching Calif. jewelry line

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—California's first lady is launching a line of jewelry featuring the state's landmarks, with a portion of the proceeds to go to the California State Protocol Fund.

Maria Shriver, wife of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, recently started wearing a charm bracelet featuring state landmarks such as the Golden Gate Bridge, the Hollywood Sign and Yosemite National Park.

The bracelet got so much attention that Shriver decided to sell similar jewelry, with profits going to a worthy cause, said her spokeswoman, Terri Carbaugh.

Los Angeles designer Jill Schiff, a friend of Shriver's, created the handmade jewelry.



California first lady Maria Shriver, left, shows off her jewelry during a tour of a garden in Berkeley, Calif., Tuesday, April 20, 2004.

"It's totally Maria's doing," Schiff told the San Jose Mercury News. "She just felt it would have a long shelf life and appeal to a lot of people."

Unveiling of the Maria Shriver California Jewelry collection was scheduled Wednesday night at the opening of the California's Remarkable Women exhibit at the State History Museum.

The collection, which ranges in price from \$18 to \$170, includes sterling silver bracelets, key chains, money clips and cuff links. About 25 percent of the price of each piece goes to the fund.

The California State Protocol Fund is set up so that the cost of hosting foreign dignitaries, promoting international trade and cross-cultural activities is paid by private donations.

Stewart may work in Brooklyn neighborhood

NEW YORK (AP)—A beleaguered Brooklyn neighborhood could get a makeover courtesy of Martha Stewart if a New York congresswoman gets her way.

Rep. Nydia Velazquez, a Democrat, asked the judge who presided over Stewart's trial to sentence the domestic doyenne to community service at a training center for low-income women in the impoverished Bushwick section of Brooklyn.

"I simply believe that Ms. Stewart's value should not be squandered as she repays the court and the American people for her crimes," Velazquez said in statement Tuesday.

"As an entrepreneur who built a company from the bottom up, and created a label that is known the world over, Ms. Stewart's skills could be put to good use" at the Maura Clarke-Ita Ford Center, Velazquez said.

The women at the center, in turn, could give Stewart "a much-needed lesson on responsibility (and) business values," Velazquez said.

\$16.8M buys Monet waterlilies

A painting of waterlilies by French Impressionist Claude Monet from the estate of Hollywood producer Ray Stark was sold for \$16.8 million Thursday night at Sotheby's New York.

The price paled beside the record \$104.2 million paid the previous evening for Picasso's "Boy With a

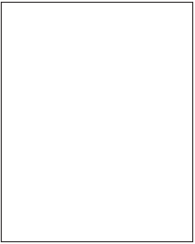
Pipe" but wildly exceeded expectations of the auction house, which had estimated the Monet's market value at \$9 million to \$12 million.

The Monet was the star of a \$96-million sale with mixed results.

A Picasso nude valued at \$3 million to \$4 million fetched

\$11 million, but 10 of the 52 artworks offered went begging. Nonetheless, Sotheby's reported a two-day take of \$314.8 million in Impressionist and Modern art sales, the firm's highest sales total for a similar group of auctions since May 1990, when the art market peaked. (*Los Angeles Times*)

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